



Achieving School Readiness

*A Strategic Plan for Young
Children
in Harford County*

Achieving School Readiness: A Strategic Plan for Young Children in Harford County was developed by the Harford County Partnership For Families (the Local Management Board) with its Early Childhood Stakeholders Committee and written by the Ready At Five Partnership. August 2006.

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Executive Summary

Harford County envisions a community where all families share opportunities equally and all children are safe, healthy, valued, cared for, and respected: a community where all children enter school ready to learn. The County is committed to continually improving outcomes for children, youth, and families.

In recent years, Harford County has emerged as one of the leading jurisdictions in Maryland with regard to the school readiness of its children. In the 2005/06 school year the County:¹

- Ranked 1st in the state for the percentage of its children entering school fully ready to learn;
- Exceeded the statewide goal of 75 percent of children fully ready for school (1 of only 3 jurisdictions meeting the goal two years ahead of the targeted 2007 school year);
- Demonstrated an 11 point increase in the number of kindergartners fully ready for school between school years (SY) 2001/02 and 2005/06 (1 of 17 jurisdictions that experienced a continued increase);
- Saw 80 percent of its kindergartners fully ready for school in SY 2005/06;
- Had 69 percent of its kindergartners fully ready in the area of Language and Literacy in SY 2005/06 - 19 percentage points higher than children in the rest of the state; and
- Experienced improved school readiness for the demographic categories of race, special education, and low-income subgroups between SY 2001/02 and SY 2005/06.

These achievements are a direct result of the County's strategic investments in children and families. However, not all children in the County have benefited equally. Harford County's school readiness data has remained virtually flat since SY 2002/03, showing only modest increases.

¹ As measured by the Maryland State Department of Education's Maryland Model for School Readiness Data (MMSR)

The most recent data (SY 2005/06) indicates:

- Twenty percent (20% or more than 500 children each year) of kindergartners needed targeted or considerable support to succeed in school.
- Gaps in school readiness continued to exist between demographic categories:
 - A 15-point gap exists between low-income children (68% fully ready) and their middle- and high-income peers (83%).
 - A 28-point gap in school readiness exists between children receiving special education services (53% fully ready) and those not requiring services (81% fully ready).
 - A 15-point gap continues to exist between African American children (68% fully ready) — the largest minority in Harford County — and their Caucasian peers (83% fully ready).

Harford County will benefit when additional targeted investments are made with regard to these subgroups of young children.

Several studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of quality early childhood education and services. The University of Wisconsin found that quality early learning experiences, such as preschool, can help level the playing field between children from low-income families, who often lag behind (sometimes by as much as one-and-a-half years), and their middle-class peers.

In fact, low-income children attending preschool have a 20 percent higher rate of high-school graduation, a 42 percent lower rate of juvenile arrest for violent offense, and a 41 percent reduction in special education placement. Most of these benefits translate into economic returns.²

² Arthur Reynolds, Professor, University of Wisconsin conducted an 18-year cost-benefit analysis of the federally funded Chicago Child-Parent Center Program. Findings were published in the *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. (Winter 2002.)

For more than 10 years, The Harford County Partnership for Families, Inc. (The Local Management Board) has worked collaboratively with the community to develop or expand programs aimed at improving the outcomes of children, youth and families in the following key result areas:

- 1) Children Successful in School
- 2) Children Safe in their Homes & Communities
- 3) Stable and Economically Independent Families

With emphasis on improving these key areas, primarily Children Successful in School, the Harford County Partnership for Families charged an Early Childhood Stakeholders Committee, comprised of various organizations, with examining the state of school readiness among the County's children.

For nearly 10 months, the Committee conducted a collaborative, strategic planning process, which included an analysis of key data pertaining to young children. This process culminated with the development of an ambitious, but essential, Action Agenda.

Harford County's Action Agenda, outlined in this document, includes a number of recommendations aimed at increasing the number of Harford County children who are fully ready for school. The plan details specific strategies to achieve the following goals:

- Goal 1: All children, birth through age 5, will have access to quality early care and education programs that meet the needs of families, including full-day options.
- Goal 2: Parents of young children will succeed in their role as their child's first teacher.

Goal 3: Children, birth through age 5, and their families, will receive necessary income support benefits and health and mental health care to ensure they arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies.

Goal 4: All early care and education staff will be appropriately trained in promoting and understanding school readiness.

Goal 5: All Maryland citizens will understand the value of quality early care and education as the means to achieve school readiness.

Goal 6: Maryland will have an infrastructure that promotes, sufficiently funds, and holds accountable its school readiness efforts.

While these goals are deliberately aligned with the goals of *Maryland's 5-year Action Agenda: Achieving School Readiness*, the 17 strategies and 62 action steps are specific to meet the needs of Harford County.

The Harford County Partnership for Families and its stakeholders have made an imperative first step, but now the Action Agenda must be implemented. To do so, the entire County must be committed to improving school readiness and support the recommendations of the Action Agenda.

Through the implementation of this Action Agenda, Harford County's children can enter school ready to learn and be successful while they are in school.

It is our firm belief that all the result areas are interconnected. Furthermore, by addressing the County's school readiness, the other targeted result areas, Children Safe in Their Homes and Communities, and Stable and Economically Independent Families, have the potential to be positively affected as well.

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The Harford County Partnership for Families



Vision

A community where all families share opportunities equally and all children are safe, healthy, valued, cared for, and respected.

Mission

Assess community assets and needs, facilitate the development of services, and monitor, evaluate, and continually improve outcomes for children, youth, and families.

Values

We believe in partnership, collaboration, and shared accountability among agencies, organizations, and communities. We believe that children and families are important in our society, and as such, they need and deserve to have a system of services that is:

- Responsive
- Integrated
- Comprehensive
- Easily Accessible
- Focused on prevention and early intervention
- Innovatively designed
- Provided in a respectful manner
- Empowering
- Outcome focused
- Culturally competent

Targeted Result Areas

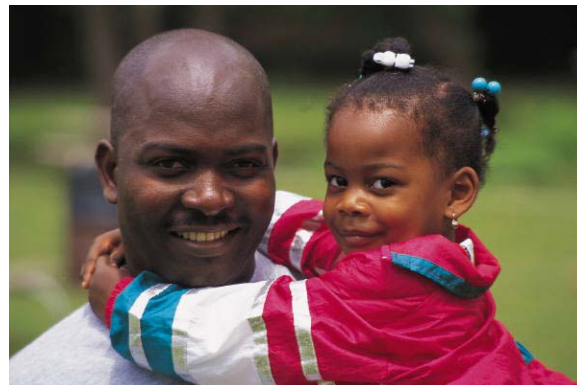
- ✓ Children Successful in School
- ✓ Children Safe in Their Homes and Communities
- ✓ Stable and Economically Independent Families

Programs

The Harford County Partnership For Families, Inc. administers 12 priority programs and engages in a multitude of collaborative partnerships to foster the strong delivery of services for children and families in the County.

Board of Directors

L. Jesse Bane, Private Citizen
Dr. Andrew S. Bernstein - Harford County Health Department
Audra L. Caplan - Harford County Public Library
Joseph I. Cassilly - Harford County State's Attorney
Mary F. Chance - Harford County Dept. of Community Services
Veronica L. Chenowith - Harford County Council
Joyce B. Eaton - Private Citizen
Theodore M. Hart - Juvenile Court Master
O'Melia V. James - Office of the Public Defender
Nathaniel T. Johnson - Aberdeen Bible Church
Maria "Doe" Ladd - Private Citizen
Sharon M. Lipford - Core Service Agency
Timothy J. Quinn - The Arc Northern Chesapeake Region
J. B. Redding - Caring Hands
Jerome M. Reyerson - Harford County Department of Social Services
Stephen P. Richards - Harford County Public Schools
John D. Rusinko - Catholic Charities
Thomas Ryan - Harford County Department of Juvenile Services
Jill A. Svrjcek - Harford County Infants & Toddlers Program
Christopher W. Swain - Harford County Sheriff's Office
Mary R. Troy - Private Citizen



Early Education Stakeholders' Committee Members

Susan Allen - Open Doors
Kathy Bailey - Harford County Public Schools
Jacinta Bush - MRDC Head Start
Ken Coulson - Harford County Partnership For Families
Jennifer Cozad - Core Service Agency
Cathy Frazier - United Way
Kaye Gibson - Harford County Partnership For Families
Sharon Grzanka - Department of Community Services
Jane Howe - Harford County Commission For Women
Patsy Jackson - Catholic Charities, Early Headstart
Wanda Jackson - The Family Tree
Mary Ellen Kelly - MD State Child Care Association
Gary Kosyjana - Child Care Administration
Evelyn Moessinger - Harford County Public Library
Marisol Rodriguez - MRDC Head Start
Melanie Scarlato - MRDC Head Start
Kim Selby - Villa Maria
Ginny Smith - Harford County Public Schools
Jill Svrjcek - Harford County Infants & Toddlers Program
Jacki Walsh - Harford Community College
Michelle Washington - Harford County Partnership For Families
Robbyn Zimmerman - Harford County Department of Social Services

...To be a community where all families share opportunities equally and all children are safe, healthy, valued, cared for, and respected.

-Vision Statement Excerpt
Harford County Partnership For Families,
Inc.

Introduction

Harford County envisions a community where all families share opportunities equally and all children are safe, healthy, valued, cared for, and respected: a community where all children enter school ready to learn. The County is committed to continually improving outcomes for children, youth, and families.

As part of this effort, Harford County is striving to:

- Ensure a system of services for families and children that is responsive, comprehensive, innovatively designed, empowering, culturally competent, integrated, easily accessible, provided in a respectful manner, outcome focused, and focused on prevention and early intervention;
- Facilitate the development of new or expansion of existing resources for children, youth, and families in the County through planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, fiscal management, and public awareness;
- Support collaborative work among community stakeholders to continue to meet the needs, fill gaps in services, and improve the lives of children and their families; and
- Promote programs that build on individual strengths in order to assist families in becoming more independent and self-sufficient.

The provision of equal and high quality opportunities for children and families begins with prenatal care and emerges from birth onward.

Neuroscientific research indicates that early experiences—both good and bad—have a significant effect on the brain's development. Researchers confirm that the way parents and caregivers interact with and the experiences provided for a young child impact the child's emotional development, learning abilities, and ultimately, success in school and later in life.

Harford County: Strategic Planning for Young Children

In response to these issues, the Harford County Partnership For Families, Inc. sought to focus on school readiness and take the lead in developing a countywide strategic plan aimed at improving school readiness.

A comprehensive strategic plan or action agenda will help the County:

- **Align** state and local efforts to improve outcomes for children to improve school readiness;
- **Accelerate** the rate of school readiness;
- **Facilitate** a shared vision, mission and values for the future of children;
- **Bring** more stakeholders into the dialogue about school readiness, elevating the importance of children entering school ready to learn;
- **Empower** each community to design the strategies that meet its particular challenges and achieve desired results;
- **Maximize** resources;

- **Strengthen and enhance** local resources through a single, integrated, aligned effort, which reduces duplication and gaps in services and increases interagency collaboration and communication;
- **Develop** a comprehensive and attainable action agenda;
- **Create** shared responsibility and accountability; and
- **Establish** a process for continuous improvement in order to reexamine services for children.

To support its strategic planning efforts, the Partnership applied for and was awarded Resource Development Enhancement Funds (RDEF) from the Governor's Office for Children (GOC).

As part of this effort, The Harford County Partnership for Families, Inc. engaged Ready At Five to provide the County with technical assistance and facilitate its strategic planning process.³ This process incorporates a Results Based- Accountability framework.

On September 15, 2005, the Harford County Partnership for Families launched its strategic planning process with a community kick-off, a meeting for more than 30 of Harford County's key stakeholders. This group, known as the Early Childhood Stakeholders' Committee, guides the Partnership's work in early childhood and has been instrumental in the development of this document.

Achieving School Readiness: A Strategic Plan for Young Children in Harford County documents the school readiness of Harford County's young children and provides

³ More detailed information on the Strategic Planning Process can be found in the Background section of this document.

detailed information and data on the county's current challenges, strengths, resources and gaps in services. It also includes a detailed blueprint or action agenda, outlining specific strategies, action steps, partner roles, timelines and associated costs for meeting the following goals for children and families in Harford County:

- Goal 1: All children, birth through age 5, will have access to quality early care and education programs that meet the needs of families, including full-day options.
- Goal 2: Parents of young children will succeed in their role as their child's first teacher.
- Goal 3: Children, birth through age 5, and their families, will receive necessary income support benefits and health and mental health care to ensure they arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies.
- Goal 4: All early care and education staff will be appropriately trained in promoting and understanding school readiness.
- Goal 5: All citizens will understand the value of quality early care and education as the means to achieve school readiness.
- Goal 6: Harford County will have an infrastructure that promotes, sufficiently funds, and holds accountable its school readiness efforts.

While these goals are deliberately aligned with the goals of Maryland's 5-year action agenda, Harford County's action agenda was designed to meet the school readiness needs of Harford County's young children.

A Word about the Data

The Partnership For Families and Ready At Five staff, in cooperation with various Harford County stakeholders, collected fact-based and perception-based data from national, state and local sources.

The data presented paints a clear picture of Harford County's young children. They document the status of children entering school ready to learn. They also indicate a number of other risk factors that can negatively impact young children, resulting in children not entering school ready to succeed.

While every attempt was made to gather the most recent and relevant data pertaining to young children (birth to age 5), some data could only be obtained for various segments of the population of Harford County children (all children under 18). Thus, care should be taken in interpreting the data of children from all ages presented in this document and its implications for young children. All data are noted by year and age of children. Data are presented in the following areas:

Fact-Based Data

Children Entering School Ready to Learn.⁴

One way to measure the school readiness of Maryland's children is through the yearly early childhood assessment conducted by Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE). Harford County Public Schools administers the assessment instrument, known as the Work Sampling System (WSS), which captures the social, physical, linguistic and cognitive skills of all entering kindergartners.

In its annual report, *Children Entering School Ready to Learn*, MSDE presents the results in terms of three levels of readiness and the number of students who have reached each of these levels:

- **Full readiness**—consistently demonstrating skills and abilities to do kindergarten work.
- **Approaching readiness**—requiring targeted instructional support to succeed in kindergarten.
- **Developing readiness**—requiring significant assistance in several areas to succeed in kindergarten.

Indicators of Child Well-Being.⁵ *A number of risk factors can have a negative impact on young children, resulting in children not entering school ready to succeed. Data were collected from a variety of sources in the following key areas:*

- **Population and family characteristics:** number of young children, ethnicity, family composition and structure;

⁴ MSDE conducted an initial assessment in school year 2000/01, sampling 30 percent of kindergartners in each county. The first statewide assessment (baseline data) of all Maryland kindergartners was conducted in school year 2001/02. Additional assessments were conducted in School Years 2002/03, 2003/04, 2004/05 and 2005/06.

⁵ Indicators of Child Well-Being identified in *America's Children: Key National Indicators of Child Well-Being* released by the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2003.

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- **Economic security:** poverty, child care costs, homelessness;
 - **Education:** parental education levels, child care options;
 - **Health:** low birth weight, births to teens, health insurance, immunizations, obesity; and
 - **Behavior and social environment:** child abuse and neglect, drug and alcohol abuse, commuting time to and from places of employment, and technology use.

Perception-Based Data

Perception-based data provide a unique perspective on children entering school ready to learn.

In October 2005, the Committee released a survey to more than 300 parents of young children in order to gauge the needs of and services utilized by Harford County's parents with young children. The compiled results of more than 140 surveys are included in this document.

Fact-based and perception-based data served as a starting point for the Committee in the development of the action agenda. The observations culled from the data served as recommendations and pointed toward areas where improvements can be made to increase children's readiness for school.

School readiness is the state of early development that enables an individual child to engage in and benefit from early learning experiences.

-The Maryland Model for School Readiness

Background

Focusing on School Readiness

School readiness is much more than a question of whether children can perform a certain set of skills when they come to school. Readiness is a continuum that begins at birth. It is about everything that children bring upon entry to school: how they have been nurtured and responded to by caregivers; the quality of health care and nutrition they have received; their developmental status; whether or not they have had experiences outside their home, played with, talked to, or read to; how they have responded; how they approach learning; and how they are able to show what they know and can do.

To do well in school, children need to be well rounded, with a variety of abilities, skills, knowledge and experiences. According to what we know about development, children must be supported and nurtured in the all areas, rather than just cognitive or academic areas.

Experts in early childhood education have identified the following areas, or domains of learning with regard to child development and school readiness:

- Physical development
- Social and emotional development
- Language and literacy
- Cognitive development:
 - Mathematical Thinking
 - Scientific Thinking
 - Social Studies
 - The Arts

It has long been known that children who enter school without critical skills and early experiences are less likely to succeed in school and in life.

In 2000, the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) developed a cutting-edge model for school readiness as a way to identify the number of kindergartners ready to start school.

The Maryland Model for School Readiness

The Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) is a framework to assist early educators in instructing and assessing young children in the knowledge, skills and behaviors they need to be prepared for the learning demands of formal schooling. The MMSR defines what children should know and be able to do in all domains of learning by the end of kindergarten. It encompasses the following:

- A state definition of “school readiness;”
- Learning standards, indicators, and objectives for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten; and
- Systematic observational assessment method that supports classroom instruction using *The Work Sampling System* (WSS) or compatible assessment systems.

The goal of the MMSR is to provide a statewide approach to enhance school readiness. Its purpose is to improve student performance. In developing the MMSR, MSDE recognized that assessment of children’s readiness to engage in and benefit from learning experiences in school was only one component of addressing school readiness. A comprehensive approach to addressing the readiness issue was in order to ensure effectiveness and success.

The five key components of the MMSR are:

- **Assessment:** understanding what children know and are able to do related to performance standards and indicators by using the WSS assessment tool or compatible assessment systems;
- **Instruction:** planning classroom learning activities and experiences based on each child's strengths, interests and needs related to performance standards;
- **Staff Development:** workshops, training, and mentoring in implementing the MMSR and using the WSS for teachers, early care providers, and other community organizations;
- **Communication:** ongoing dialogue between school staff and parents to support each child's learning; and
- **Collaboration and coordination:** working with other early care and education programs in which children participate to address the whole child, and to look at children through a common lens, with common expectations in mind.

Every fall, all kindergarten children in Maryland are assessed in each of the seven domains of learning. Specifically, kindergarten teachers look at what each child knows and is able to do using *The Work Sampling System* (WSS). Assessment checklists on all kindergarten children in Maryland are sent in to MSDE each November. Assessment data for the state is aggregated, and then disaggregated by multiple factors, including local school systems, whether or not children have had prior early care and education experiences, and many other demographics. This data assists the state and local jurisdictions in planning to target resources for young children and families to enhance school readiness.

Teachers use the WSS or MSDE-approved, compatible locally designed assessments to observe and document children's performance in the classroom over time. This observational information provides school readiness data that is based on what children know and can do when they enter kindergarten. It also enables teachers to develop a rich portrait of each child's strengths, unique abilities, and areas of concern. Knowing each child well helps teachers to make good instructional decisions about where children need more support and practice.

The WSS is just one measure of a child's school readiness and ability to succeed in kindergarten. Throughout the year, teachers continue to observe and document each child's learning and progress, providing support where needed.

The MMSR has been the impetus for investing in new state and local initiatives supporting early care and education. Involvement in the MMSR has helped many programs serving young children and families to refer to a common set of expectations for young children, and to use a common language. The school readiness data has propelled the vision of equal early opportunities for all children, especially those who have gone unserved or underserved.

By school year 2006/07, 75 percent of all kindergartners will be ready for school.

-Achieving School Readiness:
A 5-Year Action Agenda

Are Our Children Fully Ready for School?

In SY 2005/06, according to statewide MMSR data, nearly half (40%) of Maryland kindergartners entered school without the skills they need to be successful. With help, nurturing, and support, some children will catch up. But many will not. These children will continue to struggle throughout their lives, especially in school.

According to the MSDE report, *Children Entering School Ready to Learn: School Readiness Information*, in SY 2005/06:

- Sixty percent (60%) of students entering kindergarten in Maryland were “fully ready” to do kindergarten work.
- Thirty-four percent (34%) of entering students were rated as “approaching readiness” or “developing readiness” (6%) and need targeted or considerable support in order to meet kindergarten expectations.
- Disaggregated data reveal that students in the approaching/developing categories require extensive support in the domains of scientific thinking (63%), social studies (53%), language and literacy (50%), and mathematical thinking (44%).
- While children from minority groups and low-income families, as well as children with limited English proficiency and disabilities are making progress, disaggregated data reveal that these groups lag behind other children their age.

Figure 1 provides additional information.

FIGURE 1: Disaggregated Data on Maryland Students Entering Kindergarten Fully Ready to Learn	Fully Ready	GAP
Source: Maryland State Department of Education, SY2004/05		
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	69%	—
African American	52%	17
Hispanic	46%	23
Gender		
Females	66%	-
Males	55%	11
Income		
Middle/High-Income Children	67%	—
Low-Income Children (classified as receiving Free/Reduced Price Meals)	48%	19
English Proficiency		
Native English Speaking Children	62%	—
Children with Limited English Proficiency	45%	17
Special Education Services		
Children not receiving Special Education services	62%	—
Children requiring Special Education services	37%	25

In Harford County, kindergarten children fare relatively better than children in many other jurisdictions across the state. In SY 2005/06, 80 percent of children are fully ready for school compared to 60 percent in Maryland. However, this means that 20 percent of Harford County kindergarten children still need targeted or considerable assistance to do kindergarten work.

Disaggregated data reveal that Harford County faces challenges similar to Maryland:

- A 15-point gap remains between low-income and middle/high-income children.
- A 15-point gap continues to exist between African American children and their Caucasian peers.
- A 28-point gap exists between children receiving special education services and those not receiving services, slightly better than the 32-point gap in SY 2004/05. This gap is greater than the statewide figure of 25 percentage points.

Figure 2 provides additional information.

FIGURE 2: Disaggregated Data on Harford County Students Entering Kindergarten Fully Ready to Learn		
Source: Maryland State Department of Education, SY2004/05		
	Fully Ready	GAP
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	83%	—
African American	68%	15
Hispanic	63%	20
Gender		
Females	85%	-
Males	76%	9
Income		
Middle/High-Income Children	83%	—
Low-Income Children (classified as receiving Free/Reduced Price Meals)	68%	15
English Proficiency		
Native English Speaking Children	80%	—
Children with Limited English Proficiency	67%	13
Special Education Services		
Children not receiving Special Ed. services	81%	—
Children requiring Special Ed. services	53%	28

Strategic Investments

Over the last decade, the focus on a child's early years has become a priority. Federal, state and local governments and organizations are implementing policies and practices that invest in the early years and reform early care and education systems.

In 1990, former President George H. W. Bush and state governors established eight National Education Goals to improve learning and teaching. Goal One, "all children will start school ready to learn," clearly indicates school readiness as a means to improving educational achievement for all students. In 1997, the "I Am Your Child" public engagement campaign continued to bring the needs of our youngest children to the forefront. States, such as North Carolina with its *Smart Start!* Campaign, soon followed with community-based public outreach efforts.

And in 2001, the U.S. Congress significantly reformed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This new legislation, "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001," included provisions for early learner reading programs.

A Statewide Picture

Maryland also made significant investments in the early years. In 1998, the Maryland Partnership for Children, Youth and Families selected Children Enter School Ready to Learn (CESRTL) as one of eight key Result Areas that affect a child's well being and ability to grow up healthy and secure in Maryland.

Figure 3: Community Risk Factors and Systemic Issues⁶

Research suggests that a number of factors can contribute to children not entering school ready to succeed. These risk factors may include:

- Poverty
- Parental literacy needs/levels
- Abuse or neglect
- Changes in family structures
- Ethnicity
- Poor health
- Homelessness
- Parental alcohol/drug abuse
- Transience
- Teen (under age 18) births

Through the Local Management Boards (LMBs) – established in 1997 through the Maryland's Systems Reform Initiative to advance local reform efforts – jurisdictions were encouraged to develop programs and services that improve outcomes for children in one or more of these result areas. Currently, 8 of 24 LMBs have selected CESTRL as a priority and included this result area as a part of their state negotiated agreement.

In 1999, the Maryland State Board of Education adopted *Every Child Achieving: A Plan for Meeting the Needs of the Individual Learner*, which focused on two strategies for improving student readiness:

- 1) Improving and expanding child care and early education programs, and

⁶ *Achieving School Readiness: A 5-Year Action Agenda for Maryland*. Leadership in Action Program, Baltimore, Maryland: Maryland Sub-cabinet for Children, Youth and Families, 2002 and Starting Points in Maryland. Ready At Five, 1996.

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- 2) Marshalling family and community resources to prepare at-risk children for school success.

One year later, the Maryland State Board of Education and the General Assembly developed a framework, the Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR), to enhance early learning opportunities.

In 2001, 13 Judith P. Hoyer Early Childhood and Family Learning Centers (Judy Centers) were created to provide comprehensive services for young children and their families; eleven additional Judy Centers opened the following year. Harford County does not have a Judy Center presently. Judy Centers currently operate in 21 jurisdictions in Maryland, with Baltimore City and Montgomery County each operating two centers.

Three years later, the Maryland legislature continued to recognize the importance of school readiness with the passage of the 2002 Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act ("Thornton Commission Legislation"). This legislation included provisions for mandatory implementation of full-day kindergarten and pre-kindergarten for all four-year-old children living in poverty by school year 2007.

In October 2003, a 40-member statewide leadership panel, convened by the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Subcabinet for Children, Youth and Families and facilitated by the Council for Excellence in Government, released *Achieving School Readiness: A 5-Year Action Agenda*.

The Maryland Subcabinet adopted this ambitious yet realistic Action Agenda as its Strategic Plan for Early Care and Education in Maryland and the Joint Committee on Children, Youth and Families of the General Assembly expressed support for the Action Agenda.

Through the 2005 General Assembly actions, the Division of Early Childhood Development (DECD) was created within the Maryland State Department of Education.

The DECD includes the Early Learning Branch, which oversees the Maryland Model for School Readiness, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten curriculum, the Judith P. Hoyer Programs, Head Start Collaboration, and Early Childhood Accreditation, as well as programmatic and policy issues related to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten.

In addition, the Child Care Administration (previously located in the Department of Human Resources) was moved to DECD and was renamed the Office of Child Care (OCC). DECD also manages the contracts for the Maryland Child Care Resource Network, part of the Maryland Committee for Children and the Family Support Network of Friends of the Family.

A Local Picture

Over the last several years, Harford County also made significant strategic investments and spearheaded efforts to improve outcomes for young children.

In 1994, the Harford County Partnership For Families, Inc. (LMB), began as a nonprofit organization whose purpose was to assess community assets, facilitate service development, and share accountability for improving outcomes for children, youth, and families. Program highlights and select strategic investments regarding children include:

- The Family Preservation Program, an intensive community-based program that provides crisis intervention and stabilization services to families referred from local health, juvenile justice, education, and social service agencies.
- In 1997, the Partnership facilitated the development of the Children in Need of Supervision Diversion Program, now named the Bridges to Success Program. The main focus of the program is to divert children from delinquency and formal involvement in the juvenile justice system utilizing a community-based in-home approach.
- Project PrePARE is an enhancement of the Bridges to Success Program, developed in partnership with Catholic Charities/Villa Maria. The program identifies at-risk youth early, providing youth and families with services in an effort to prevent formal involvement with the juvenile justice system.
- The Partnership selected Catholic Charities to implement an early assessment and intervention program known as "Safe Start."

Safe Start, a partnership consisting of numerous agencies, is an early assessment and intervention program focused on preventing child abuse and neglect by providing screening, referral, and intervention services to families with children from birth to age six.

Additional investments by key organizations in the County were also made. Harford County Early Head Start and the Harford County Infants and Toddlers Program developed an interagency agreement to provide comprehensive services to identified children from birth to age 3 and their families.

In 2005, The Harford County Partnership For Families, Inc. created the Early Childhood Stakeholders Committee, aimed at improving young children's readiness for school.

For more than 10 months, and with limited or no funding, the Harford County Partnership For Families and its stakeholder committee embarked on a systematic and collaborative strategic planning process of determining what Harford County wants for its young children and how it will get there.

Through strategic planning, Harford County can better serve its children. Strategic Planning enables the community to focus its energy and develop or adjust the community's vision for young children in response to a changing environment. At the same time, it ensures the entire community is using the MMSR data, working toward the same goals, using a common language, and looking at children through a common lens.

Harford County used a Results-Based Accountability framework throughout the strategic planning process.

Several priority goals and related activities were identified in the context of this process, and are detailed in the Action Agenda section of this document.

Results-Based Accountability⁷

RBA is a disciplined way of thinking and taking action which communities can use to improve the lives of children, families and the community as a whole. RBA starts with ends and works backward, step-by-step, to means. For communities, the ends are conditions for the well being of children, families and the community. For example: children entering school ready to succeed.

RBA is a process that helps partners move from talk to action. It uses plain language and asks partners to consider, 'What can be done to *Turn the Curve*.'

Specifically, RBA uses the following thinking process:

- Step 1: What are the quality of life conditions (results) we want for our community and our children and families?
- Step 2: What would these conditions look like if we could see, feel, and experience them?
- Step 3: How can we measure if these conditions exist or not (indicators)? Are the measures getting better or worse? Where are we headed, if we just keep doing what we're doing now?
- Step 4: Who are the partners that have a potential role to play in improving the end results?
- Step 5: What can we do that is no-cost or low-cost? In addition to things that cost money, what works to improve results?
- Step 6: What do we, individually and as a group, propose to actually do?

⁷ Excerpt from *Results-Based Accountability (RBA), for Communities and Programs that want to get from Talk to Action*. Written by Mark Friedman. February 2004.

Profile of Harford County: Young Children and Families

Located in northeastern Maryland and sitting geographically between two large cities (Baltimore and Philadelphia), Harford County, historically a rural county, has seen rapid growth and an influx of families relocating from urban areas. Populated town centers are interspersed between horse farms and new subdivisions.

The data and figures that follow provide an in-depth look at Harford County's young children, specifically:

- Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR) data;
- Indicators for child well-being, including data focused on population and family characteristics, economic security, education, health, and behavior and the social environment; and
- Perception-based data.

The data highlight the County's strengths and challenges, as well as paint a clear picture for key areas in which the Action Agenda must focus in order to improve school readiness

School Readiness Data⁸

In SY 2005/06, more than 2,800 children entered Harford County kindergarten classrooms.

FIGURE 4: PreK and Kindergarten Enrollment School Year 2005/06 <i>Source: MSDE</i>	Harford County	Maryland
Total number of children in PreK and K	3,611	81,078
Total number of children enrolled in half-day PreK	803	24,219
Total number of children enrolled in full-day K	1954	45,777
Total number of children enrolled in half-day K	854	11,082

MSDE's School Readiness Baseline information report indicates that 80 percent of students were "fully ready" for school. This means, however, that 20 percent of children (more than 500 students each year) require targeted and in-depth support to succeed in school.

While the County is one of three jurisdictions exceeding the statewide goal (75 percent of children fully ready) two-years ahead of the targeted 2007 school year, there are still considerable challenges. Gaps exist along income, ethnicity, gender, and special education status. In the critical academic content areas, more than 25 percent of students need support in the areas of mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, and language & literacy.

Finally, it is notable that the level of kindergarten readiness varies based on a child's previous experience. Harford County kindergarten children who were enrolled in child care centers, family childcare, non-public nursery schools, and pre-kindergarten showed higher levels of full readiness than did their counterparts who were at home or with informal childcare.

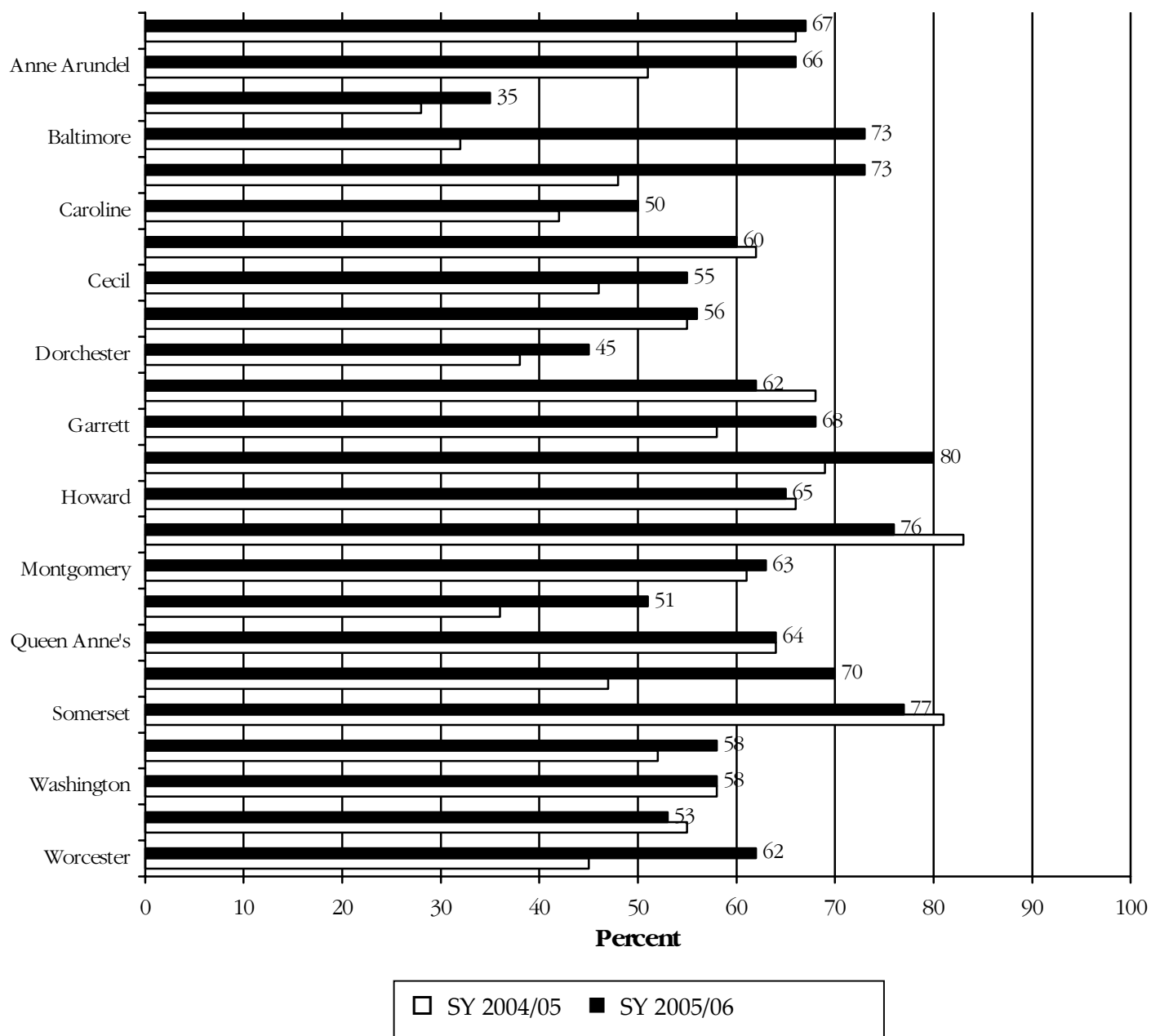
⁸ Source of all School Readiness Data: *Children Entering School Ready to Learn, School Readiness Information*, Maryland State Department of Education, SY 2001/02, SY 2002/03, SY 2003/04, SY 2004/05, and SY 2005/06. Percentage totals in subsequent graphs may not equal 100 percent due to rounding. The number of children indicated in each graph may vary depending on the total number of completed assessments in each category.

1. In SY 2005/06, Harford County ranked 1st in the state for the percentage of its children entering school fully ready to learn and was one of only three jurisdictions meeting the statewide goal (75% fully ready by 2007).

FIGURE 5

Maryland Kindergartners Entering School Fully Ready to Learn, by County

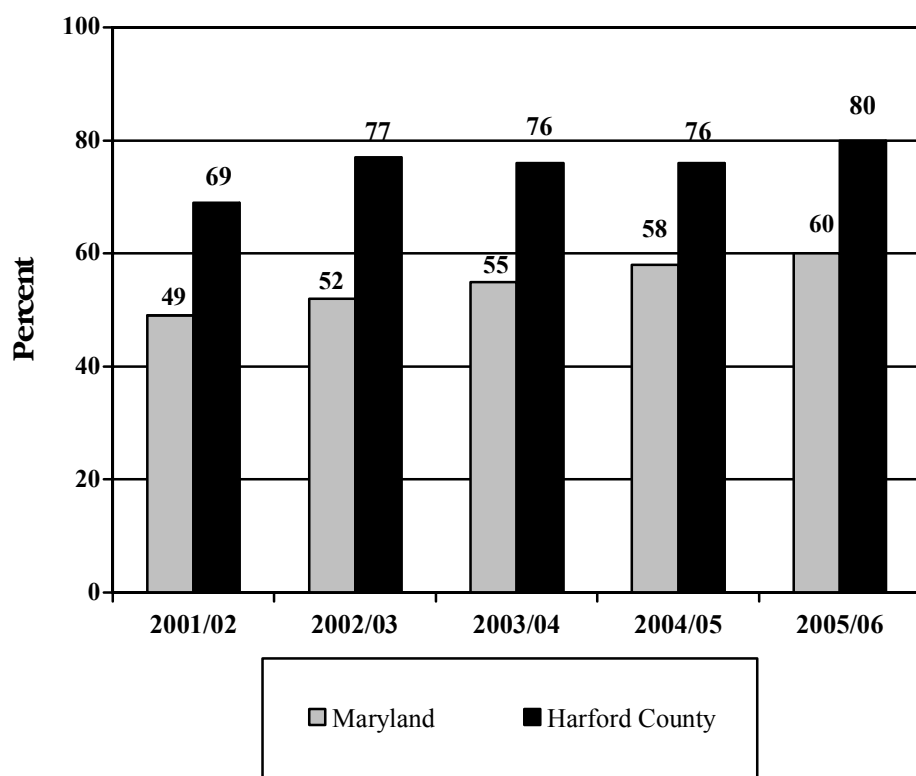
Total Harford County Children Assessed in SY 2005/06: 2,764



-
2. In SY 2005/06, 80 percent of Harford County's kindergartners were assessed as fully ready for school, higher than the state average of 60 percent. Although the majority of kindergarten students are consistently ready for school, Harford County's MMSR scores have remained virtually flat since SY 2002/03.

FIGURE 6
Harford County Children Entering School Ready to Learn, by School Year

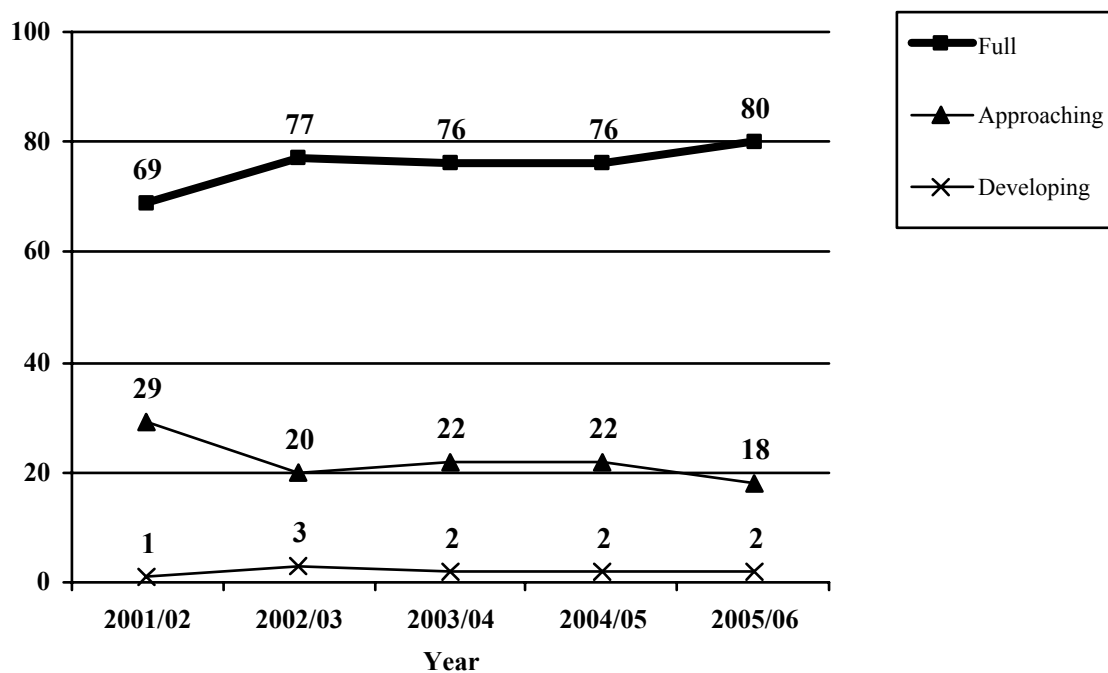
Total Harford County Children Assessed in SY 2005/06: 2,764



3. In SY 2005/06, 80 percent of kindergarten students in Harford County were evaluated by their teachers as “fully ready,” an 11-point increase from school year 2001/02, but twenty percent of kindergarteners (more than 500 children) needed support to succeed in school.

FIGURE 7
Harford County Children Entering School Ready to Learn, by School Year

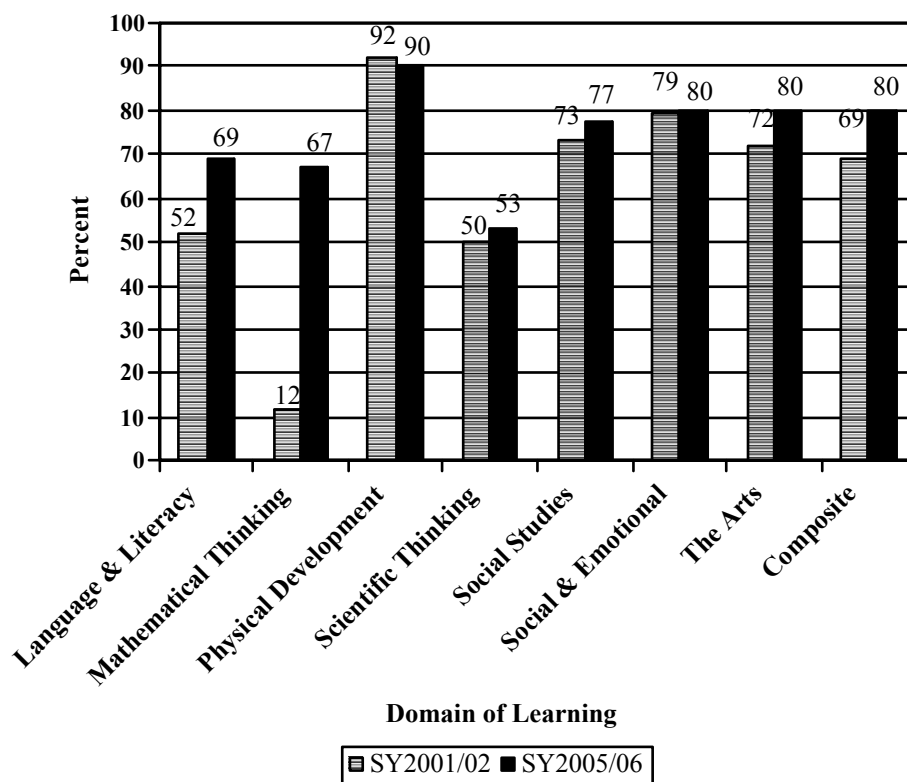
Total Harford County Children Assessed in SY 2005/06: 2,764



4. Substantial gains were made across all Domains of Learning. Yet, there is still a critical need for improvements in the areas of Mathematical Thinking (67% fully ready) and Scientific Thinking (53% fully ready)

FIGURE 8
Harford County Children Entering School Ready to Learn, by Domain of Learning

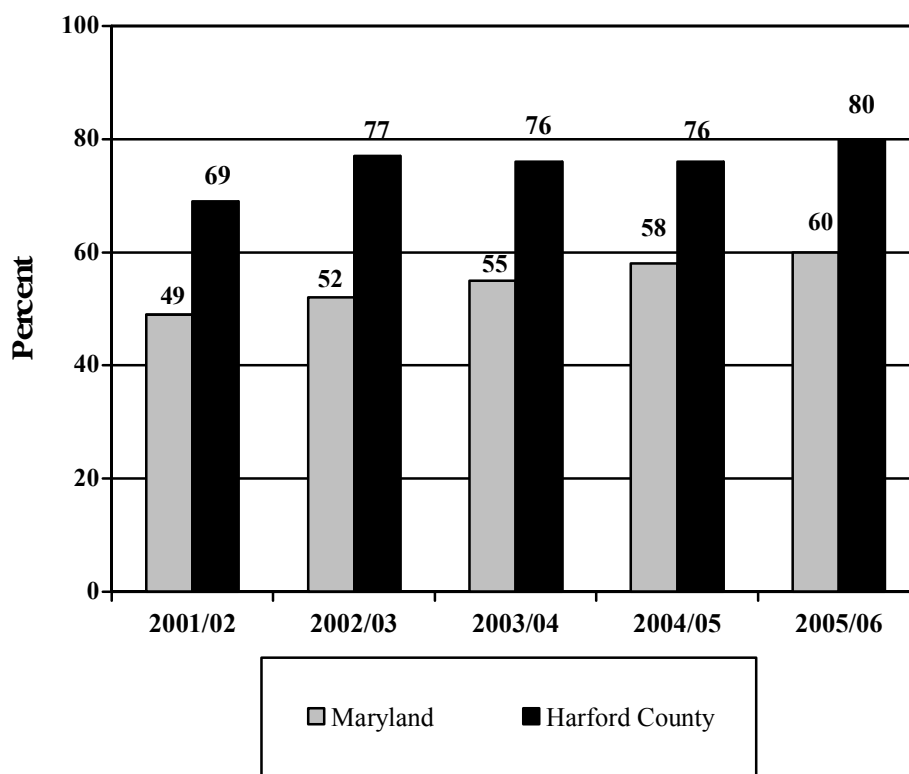
Total Harford County Children Assessed in SY 2005/06: 2,764



-
5. In the area of Language & Literacy, a key predictor of academic success, the five-year gain was 17 points. In school year 2005/06, 31 percent of Harford County children (872 children) require targeted or considerable assistance to do kindergarten work and may require additional support in subsequent years to successfully complete the Grade 3 Maryland State Assessment (MSA) in reading.

FIGURE 9
**Children Entering School Ready to Learn,
Language & Literacy Scores, Harford County and Maryland**

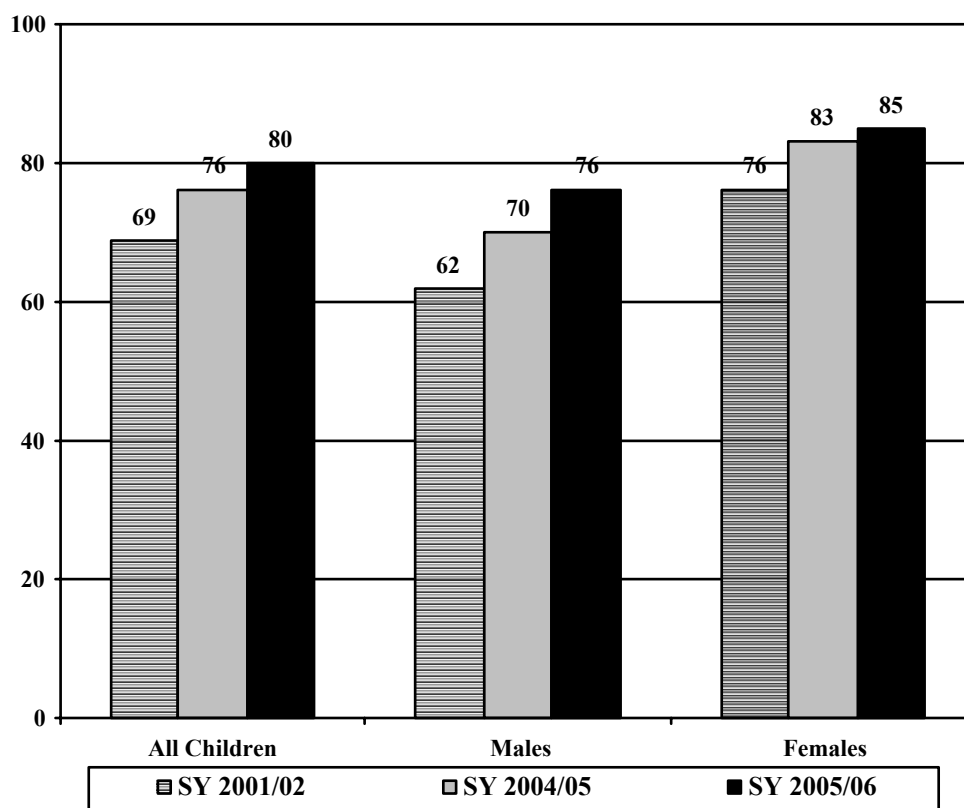
Total Harford County Children Assessed in SY 2005/06: 2,764



6. In the last five years, both genders made remarkable gains: males gained 14 points and females gained 9 points. Wide gaps, however, remain. In 2005/06, 85% of females were fully ready for school, compared with 76% of males.

FIGURE 10
Harford County Children Entering School Fully Ready to Learn, by Gender

Total Harford County Assessed in SY 2005/06: Males=1,497, Females=1,265

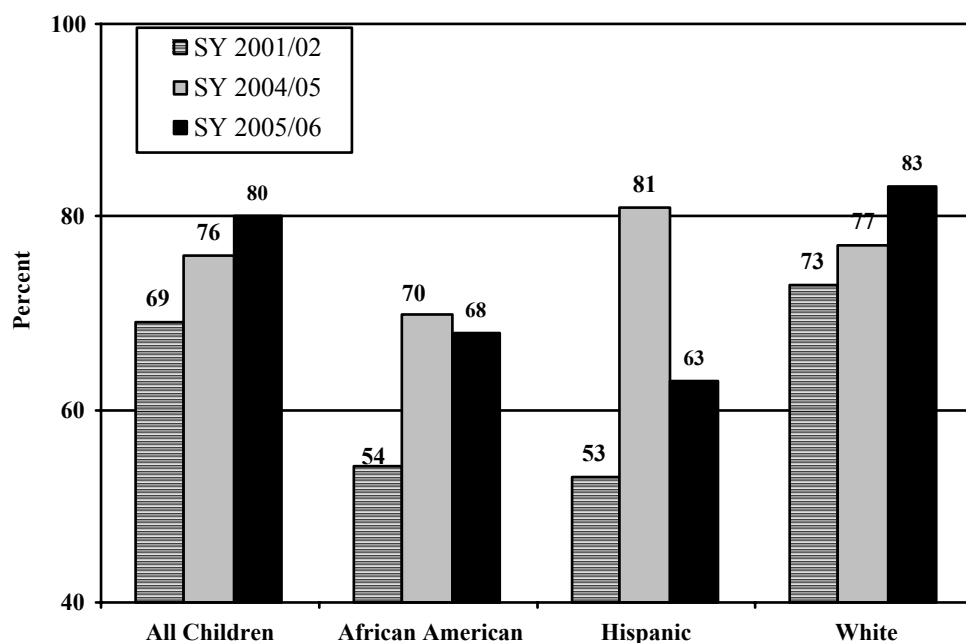


7. Substantial gains were made by African American children: 68 percent were fully school-ready in 2005/06, up from 54 percent in 2001/02. Disparities, however, continue to exist. There is a 15-point gap between African American and Caucasian kindergartners, and a 20-point gap between Hispanic and Caucasian kindergartners.

FIGURE 11
Harford County Children Entering School Fully Ready to Learn, by Race/Ethnicity

Total Harford County Children Assessed in SY 2005/06: 2,764

White=2,078, African American=476, Hispanic=76, Other=134

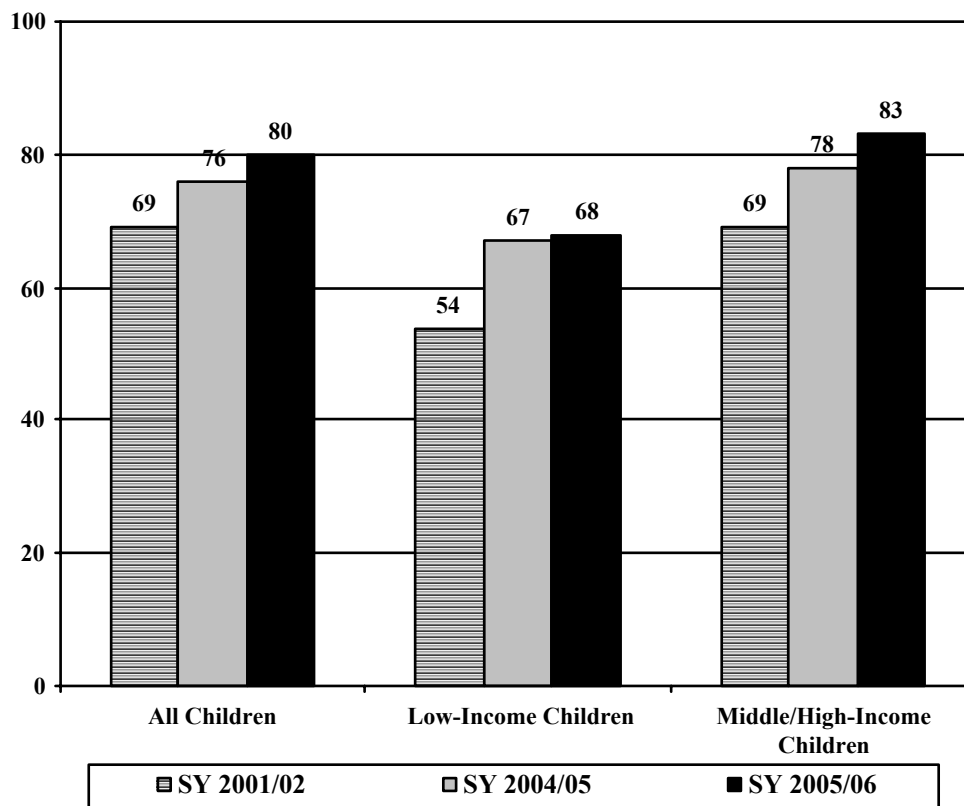


8. Low-income children (children receiving Free and Reduced Price Meals)(FRPM) and middle/high-income children showed improvement. In 2005/06, 68 percent of low-income children were fully ready for school, rising from 54 percent in 2001/02. Children from low-income families, however, are less likely to be fully ready for school (68 percent of low income children, compared with 83 percent of their peers). This means that 32 percent of children from low-income families (199 children) require considerable and targeted support to do kindergarten work.

FIGURE 12
Harford County Children Entering School Ready to Learn, by Income

Total Harford County Children Assessed in SY 2005/06: 2,764

Low-Income=623, Middle/High-Income=2,141

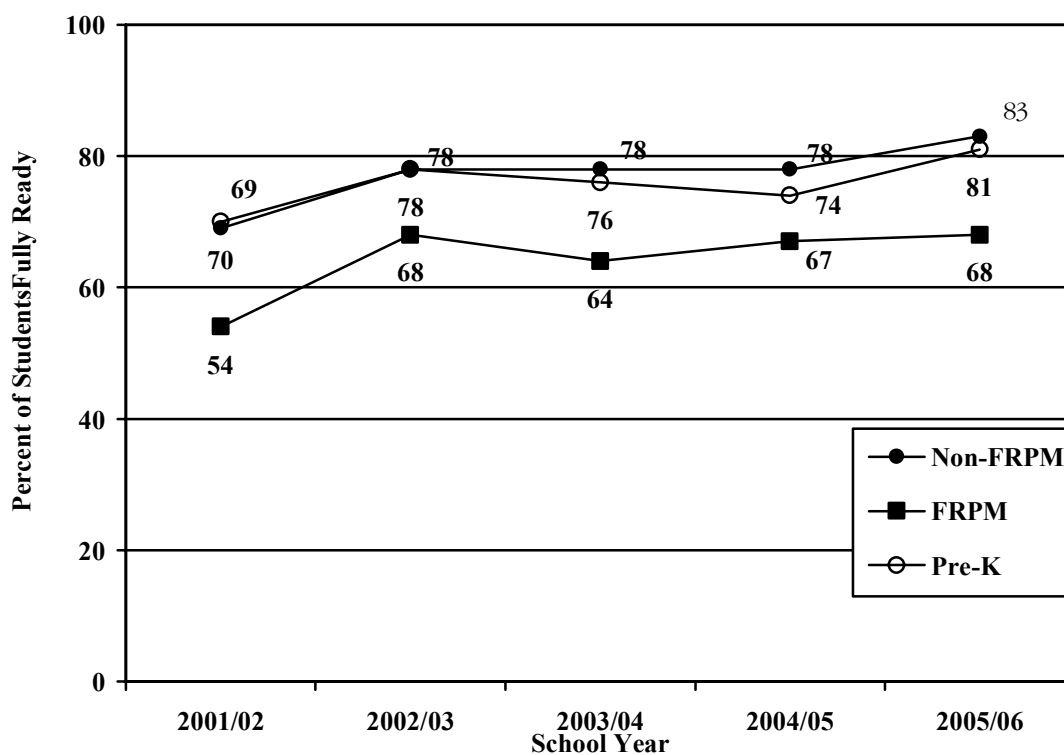


9. PreK programs for at-risk children may help close the gap in readiness for children with low income.⁹

FIGURE 13
Harford County Children Entering School Ready to Learn,
by PreK Experience and Income Level

Total Harford County Children Assessed in SY2005/06:

Free/Reduced Price Meals=623, Non-Free/Reduced Price Meals=2,141, PreK=966



⁹ Low-income children are eligible for both FRPM and preK. This chart compares readiness for children in preK with children of similar socioeconomic backgrounds. In 2004, children enrolled in preK prior to school were 74% fully ready compared with 67% of their low-income peers (children receiving FRPM).

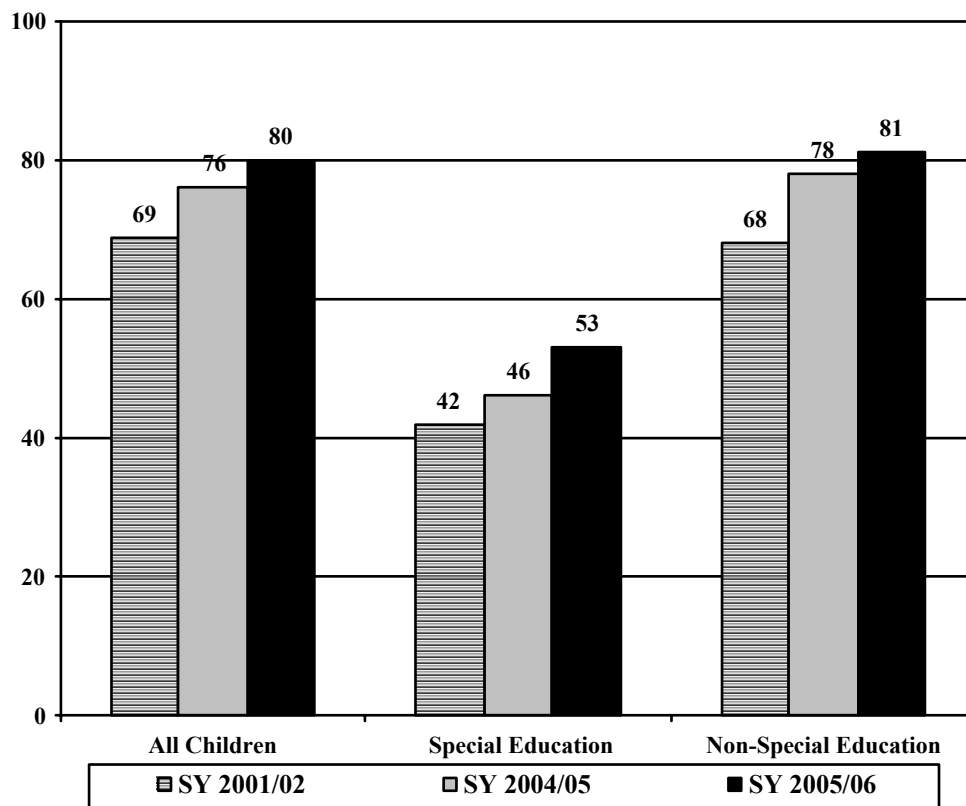
10. Although the school readiness of children receiving special education services has improved in the last three years, in SY 2004/05 there was a 28-point gap between these children and those not receiving services. This means that the majority of kindergartners receiving special education services (54 percent or 95 students) required targeted or considerable support to do kindergarten work.

FIGURE 14

Harford County Children Entering School Ready to Learn, by Special Education Designation

Total Harford County Children SY2004/05:

Special Education=177 children, Non-Special Education=2,445 children



11. The level of kindergarten readiness varies based upon a child's previous experience. Harford County children who were enrolled in child care centers, family childcare, and non-public nursery schools showed higher levels of full readiness than children who were enrolled in Head Start programs, home/informal care, and pre-K.¹⁰

FIGURE 15
Harford County Children Entering School Ready to Learn, by Prior Care¹¹

PRIOR CARE	READINESS LEVEL							
	SY 2003/04				SY 2005/06			
	Kindergarten Population		FULL		Kindergarten Population		FULL	
	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N
Child care center	14.2	376	76	285	17.3	480	80	336
Family childcare	5.9	155	77	120	3.0	84	85	71
Head Start	3.0	78	54	42	2.3	65	63	41
Home/informal care	15.5	408	60	246	14.9	413	65	270
Pre-kindergarten	33.2	877	76	666	34.8	966	81	779
Non-public nursery school	28.2	745	87	646	27.6	767	88	675

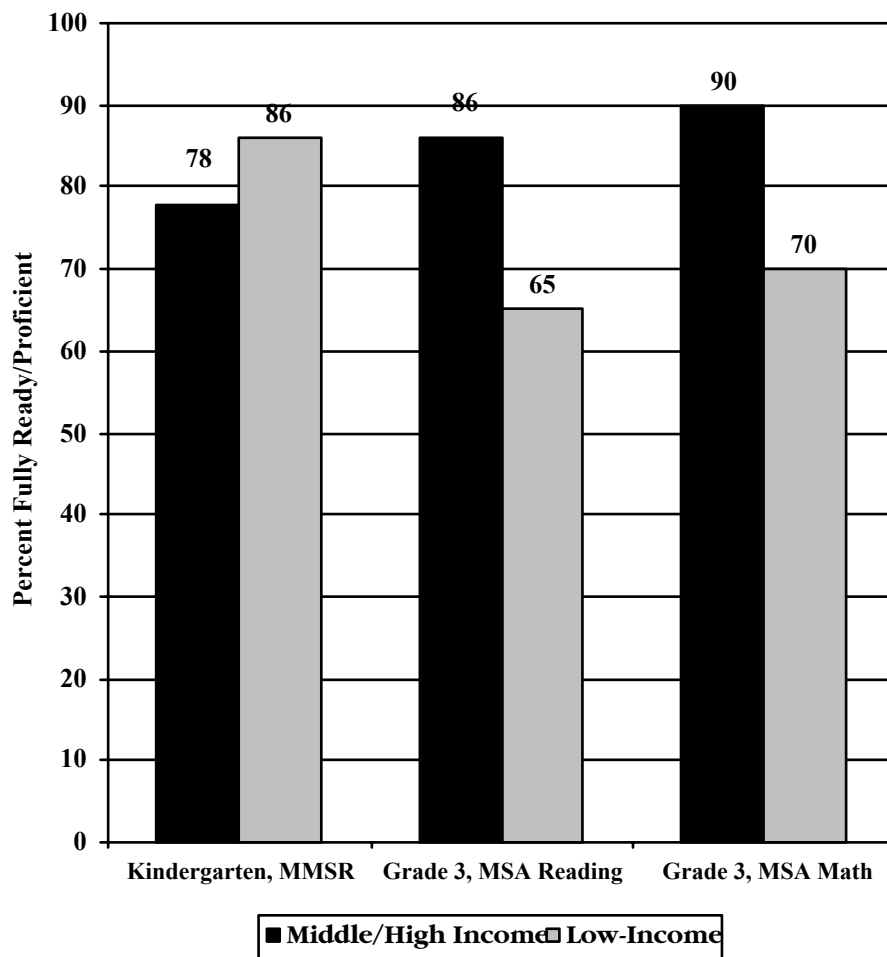
¹⁰ NOTE: In 2003/04, MSDE changed the data collection methodology. As a result, the SY 2003/04 data serves as the baseline. The results in children's school readiness by prior care from previous years cannot be used for comparison.

¹¹ NOTE: The categories of early care and education are considered as they impact school readiness. The prior care types are defined as:

1. **Child Care Center.** Childcare provided in a facility, usually non-residential, that for part or all of the day provides care to children in the absence of the parent. The Maryland State Department of Education, Office of Child Care licenses the centers.
2. **Family Child Care.** Regulated care given to a child younger than 13 years of age, in place of parental care for less than 24 hours a day, in a residence other than the child's residence and for which the provider is paid. It is regulated by The Maryland State Department of Education, Office of Child Care.
3. **Home/Informal Care.** Care by parent(s), relatives, or other caretakers.
4. **Head Start.** A federal pre-school program for 2 to 5 year olds from low-income families; funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and licensed The Maryland State Department of Education, Office of Child Care.
5. **Non-Public Nursery School.** Preschool programs with an educational focus for 3- and 4-year-olds; approved or exempted by the Maryland State Department of Education; usually part-day or part-year.
6. **Pre-Kindergarten.** Public school pre-kindergarten education for 4-year-old children. Administered by local Boards of Education and regulated by the Maryland State Department of Education.

12. Children who are not fully ready for kindergarten may continue to struggle academically throughout the elementary school years. For example, in SY 2002/03, only 68 percent of low-income kindergartners were fully ready for school, compared with 78 percent of their middle/high-income peers. By Grade 3, these children continued to lag behind their peers, as indicated on the SY 2005/06 Maryland State Assessments in Math (65% proficient vs. 86% proficient) and Reading (70% proficient vs. 90% proficient).

FIGURE 16
Harford County Children Entering School Ready to Learn and Grade 3 MSA Proficiency

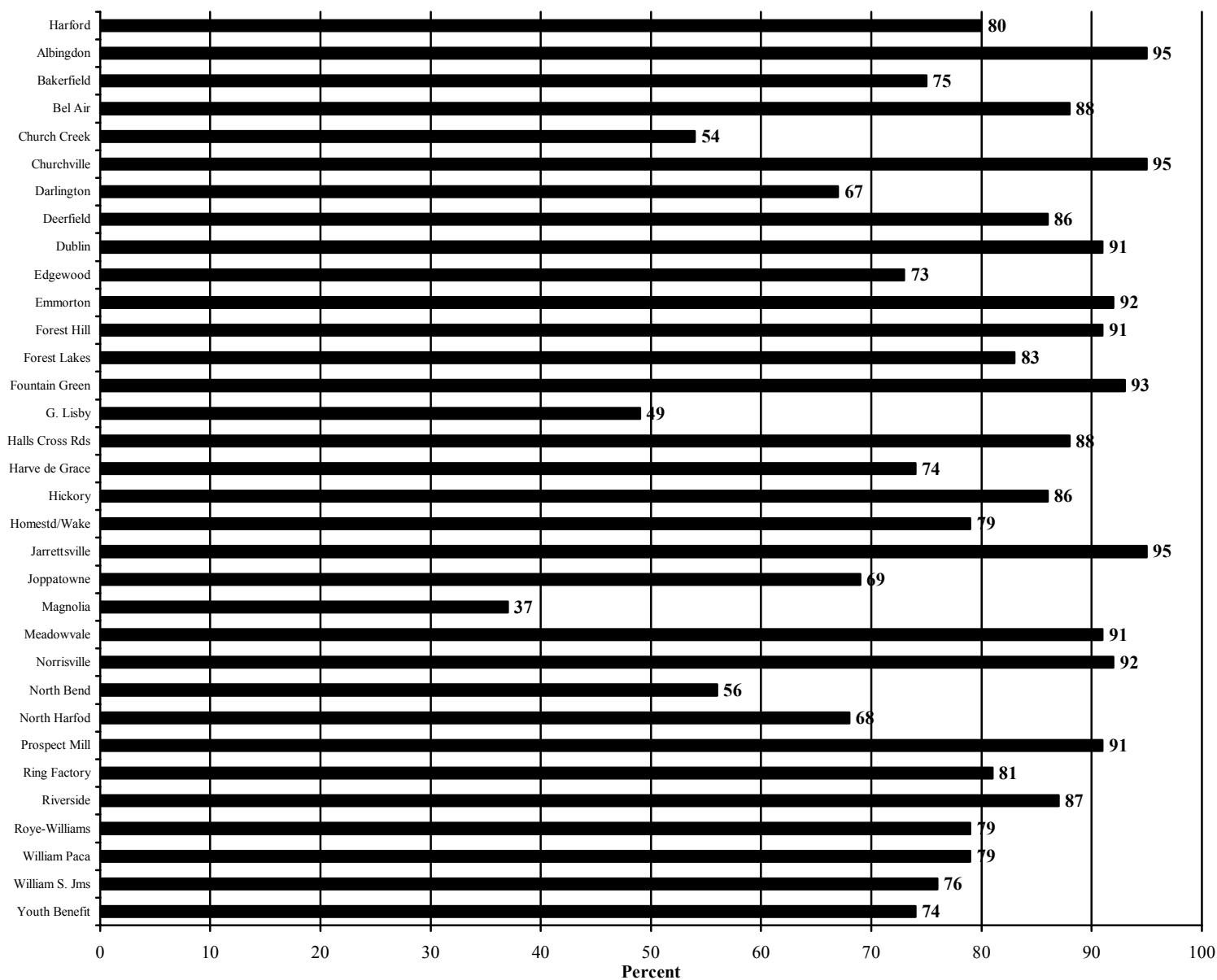


13. While the composite scores for SY 2005/06 indicate that 80 percent of Harford County children were fully ready, four elementary schools fall far below the county and/or state averages, including Church Creek (54%), G. Lisby (49%), Magnolia (37%), and North Bend (56%) Elementary Schools.

FIGURE 17

Harford County Children Entering School Ready to Learn, by Elementary School

Total Kindergarten Children: Harford=2,815, Abingdon=132, Bakerfield=67, Bel Air=78, Church Creek=135, Churchville=62, Darlington=21, Deerfield=86, Dublin=33, Edgewood=68, Emmorton=94, Forest Hill=95, Forest Lakes=116, Foundation Green=107, G. Lisby=52, Halls Cross Roads=57, Harve de Grace=58, Hickory=114, Homestead/Wakefield=154, Jarrettsville=58, Joppatowne=85, Magnolia=89, Meadowvale=95, Norrisville=38, North Bend=62, North Harford=76, Prospect Mill=142, Ring Factory=80, Riverside=77, Roye-Williams=84, William Paca/Old Post=172, William S. James=69, and Youths Benefit=155.



14. Elementary schools with low school readiness scores may also have high percentages of children with economic and social challenges, such as higher than average poverty and mobility rates.

FIGURE 18 <i>Sources: Maryland State Department of Education, School Year 2005</i>	Harford County	Church Creek Elementary	G. Lisby Elementary	Magnolia Elementary	N. Bend Elementary
Total enrollment	40,212				
Elementary enrollment	14,698	778	347	515	449
PreK enrollment	895	41	36	40	62
Kindergarten enrollment	2,815	135	52	89	65
Percent of children by ethnicity					
American Indian	.5	1.0	.9	1.2	1.8
Asian	2.6	3.8	3.7	1.6	1.3
African American	18.3	38.0	35.7	69.3	2.0
White	75.5	52.8	55.0	20.2	94.0
Hispanic	2.9	4.2	4.6	7.8	.6
Percent of children receiving free/reduced lunch (low income)	23.3	31.8	52.7	79.8	9.7
Percent of elementary ELL children	1.4	1.6	1.3	2.0	0
Percent of elementary children receiving special education services	14.9	13.6	19.4	16.3	18.3
Percent of student mobility (Entrants/Withdrawals)	8.7/8.0	12.1/13.0	16.5/17.1	18.6/13.8	3.47/4.2
Percent of student mobility by low income (Entrants/Withdrawals)	18.8/16.7	18.8/19.3	23.0/24.1	19.6/12.6	12.7/5.1
Percent of Class not taught by "Highly Qualified Teachers"	11.1	2.3	2.8	11.3	1.1
Title I Status	--	NO	YES	YES	NO
Percent of Kindergartners Fully Ready	80	54	49	37	56
Percent of Low-Income Kindergartners Fully Ready	68	44	46	41	50
Percent of Kindergartners Receiving Special Education Services Fully Ready	53	50	50	20	20
Percent of Kindergartners Fully Ready in area of Language & Literacy	66	46	0	24	52
Percent of Kindergartners Fully Ready in Mathematical Thinking	61	48	0	20	38

Population and Family Characteristics¹²

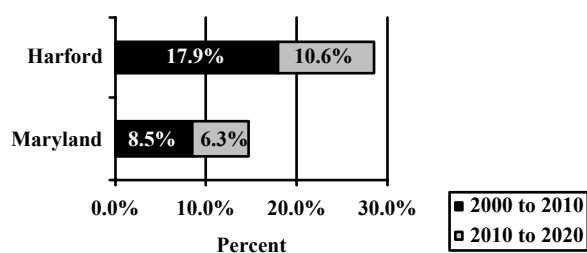
The general population of Harford County, 227,713, had grown 31 percent as of 2003, while the child population had grown by 7 percent. Between 2000 and 2003, Harford County's population growth ranked 10th in the State. Neighboring Counties—Cecil (7.6% growth, ranking 6th in the State) and Baltimore County (3.0% growth, ranking 17th in the State)—experienced slightly different growth patterns.

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of children under age 5 grew by nearly 7 percent, to a total of 15,776 children. The largest number of children, under age five (approximately 27%), resides in the Bel Air area.

By 2020, the County's population is expected to grow by 27.7 percent, for a total population of nearly 280,000, which is well above population forecasts for Maryland (Figure 19).

FIGURE 19: Population Forecasts

Source: DHR FactPack 2003



The composition of the County continues to diversify, though it is predominantly White (86.8%). However, between 1990 and 2000 the number of African Americans residing in Harford County increased by 9.4 percent (to 9.3 percent of the County's total population).

During that same time period, people of Hispanic origin increased by 18.8 percent (to 4,169 residents or 1.9 percent of the County's total population).

Over 5 percent of the County residents, ages five and older, speak languages other than English at home, compared with 12 percent in Maryland. The total number of elementary students in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs in Harford County Public Schools is relatively small (220 children).

Harford County's young children experience changing family structures and living arrangements. Forty-one percent (41.4%) of all households in Harford County have children under age 18. Twenty-eight percent (28%) of children in Harford County are young children ages birth to five—representing 7.2 percent of the total population.

In 2003, 25 percent of all births in Harford County were to unmarried women, lower than the statewide average of 34 percent. Two percent of all births in the County were to teens (mothers under the age of 18).

Over 15 percent of children, under age 5, live in single-parent families. The majority of children under age 6 (63%) have their sole parent or both parents in the labor force. In Maryland, 67 percent of young children have both parents in the labor force. A growing number of grandparents living with their grandchildren—in 2000, nearly 40 percent—are responsible for their grandchildren, the same as the statewide data.

Figures 20 and 21 provide additional population and family environment data.

¹² Sources: *KIDS COUNT Online* (Annie E. Casey Foundation), *US Census 1990* (United States Census Bureau), *US Census 2000* (United States Census Bureau).

FIGURE 20: Population Data

Sources: DHR Fact Pack 2003, KIDS COUNT Online, U.S. Census 1990, and U.S. Census 2000

Harford County			
	Base Year	Most Current Year	Change
Population (1990/2000)	182,132	218,590	+ 20.0%
County population as percent of State population	4.2%	4.1%	- 2.4%
Race and Hispanic Origin			
Caucasian	89.3%	86.8%	- 2.8%
Black	8.5%	9.3%	+ 9.4%
Hispanic Origin	1.6%	1.9%	+18.8%
Percent of population, under age 5 (1990/2000)	8.1%	7.2%	- 11.1
Number of children (1990/2000)			
Under 5	14,761	15,776	+ 6.9%
Birth to age 5 (under age 6)	17,684	19,138	+ 8.2%
Under age 18	48,782	60,965	+ 25.0%
Total Births to County Residents (2002/2003)	2,901	2,905	same
School Enrollment (1993/2005)	33,793	40,294	+19.2%
Kindergarten Enrollment (2004/2005)	2,656	2,815	+5.9

FIGURE 21: Family Environment Data

Sources: DHR Fact Pack 2003, KIDS COUNT Online, U.S. Census 1990, and U.S. Census 2000

Harford County			
	Base Year	Most Current Year	Change
Total Households	63,193	79,667	+ 26.1%
Total Families (1990/2000)	50,158	60,403	+20.4%
<i>As percent of all households</i>	79.4%	75.8%	- 4.5%
Married couple families	42,421	49,285	+ 16.2%
<i>As percent of all households</i>	67.1%	61.9%	- 7.7%
Female householder families	5,825	8,128	+ 39.5%
<i>As percent of all households</i>	9.2%	10.2%	+ 10.9%
Families with children under age 5 (1990/2000)	11,309	12,102	+ 7.0%
<i>As percent of all households</i>	17.8%	15.00%	- 15.7%
Average family size (1990/2000)	3.19	3.14	- 1.6%
Average household size (1990/2000)	2.83	2.72	- 3.9%
Persons (age 5 and older) who speak language other than English (ESL)	5.1%	5.7%	+ 11.8%
Children under age 6 with all parents present in household working	9,816	11,553	+ 17.7%
<i>Percent</i>	55.5%	63.1%	
Children under 12 with mothers in workforce	58.0%	76.0%	+ 31.0%

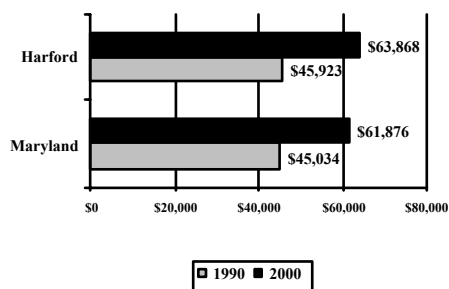
Economic Security¹³

Harford County has experienced strong economic growth in the last decade. It is a fairly wealthy county, with the median family income rising by nearly 40 percent in the last ten years. It is currently over \$63,000. The median housing value also rose by more than 30 percent during the same time period, with more than 78 percent of residents owning their own home. (See Figure 22.)

FIGURE 22

Harford County Median Family Income

Source: US Census Bureau, 2000



The County's unemployment rate dropped 13.5 percent between 1995 and 2005 and is currently at 4.5 percent, compared with Maryland's 4.2 percent unemployment rate. This trend is expected to continue, as Harford County is slated for an influx of more than 10,000 jobs due to the federal government restructuring military bases (BRAC).

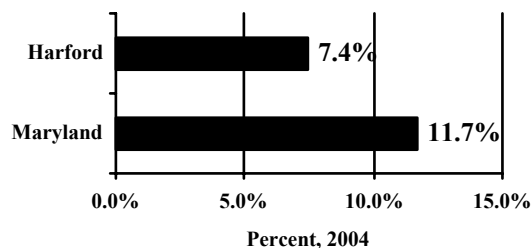
While the County experiences strong economic growth, areas of severe poverty exist. Seven percent of children under age five (1,136 children), the majority of whom are Caucasian, live below the poverty level. (See Figure 23.)

¹³ Sources: DHR FactPack 2003 (Maryland State Department of Human Resources), KIDS COUNT Online (The Annie E. Casey Foundation), US Census 1990 (United States Census Bureau), and US Census 2000 (United States Census Bureau).

FIGURE 23

Harford County Children (< 5) in Poverty

Source: KIDS COUNT Online



In 2000, the average family income for female-headed households was \$38,362, in contrast to \$79,470 for married couples. The majority of families in poverty live in District 2 (Halls Cross), where 8 percent of the families are in poverty.

In rural, isolated regions of the County, mostly in the northern region, families who live in poverty have minimal access to services and support. Few community services target this population.

Harford County families in poverty continue to struggle with and spend a disproportionate amount of their income on living expenses. In fact, a family of four (two adults and two children) spends an estimated \$13,548 a year for child care costs; low-income families can spend more than 35 percent of their income on childcare, compared with 18.6 percent of income for middle-income families. Additionally, the average cost of childcare for one child (age 4) in full-time care in Harford County is \$6,508; the average annual in-state tuition for a 4-year public college in Maryland is \$5,132 (not including room and board).

A growing number of Harford County children and families rely on local, state, and federal services:

- In 2003, 11,665 children (19.1%) under age 18 were enrolled in Medicaid.
- In 2003, 2,577 children received Women, Infants and Children (WIC) supplements, a 73 percent increase up from 1497 since 1990.
- In 2003, 3,372 households participated in the food stamp program, up from 1,889 households in 1990, a 12.3 percent increase.
- In SY 2005/06, 27.7 percent of elementary school children in Harford County Public Schools received free

and reduced price meals, up from 12.3 in 1999.

- In 2003, 1,281 children received childcare subsidies (Purchase of Care vouchers—POC), up from 396 in 1990. Only 58 percent of family care providers and 87 percent of center based child care accept POC.
- In 2003, 992 Harford County residents spent a total of 26,784 nights in emergency shelters—more than 2,000 were turned away.

Figures 24, 25 and 26 provide more detailed economic indicators, including the cost of childcare and services for children and families.

FIGURE 24: Economic Data

Sources: DHR Fact Pack 2003, KIDS COUNT Online, U.S. Census 1990, and U.S. Census 2000

		Harford County		
		Base Year	Most Current Year	Change
Family Income (1989/1999)	Median income	\$45,923	\$63,868	+ 39.1%
	Average (mean)	\$58,400	\$72,767	+ 24.6%
Average Female Head of Household, no husband, Family Income (1989/1999)		\$18,639	\$38,362	+ 105.8%
Average Married Couple Family Income (1989/2000)		\$54,360	\$79,407	+ 105.8%
Unemployment rate (1995/2005)		5.2%	4.5%	- 13.5%
Families living in poverty (1990/2000)		4.1%	3.6%	- 12.2%
Median Housing Value (1990/2000)		\$114,700	\$149,800	+ 30.6%
	Monthly Mortgage	\$883	\$1,242	+ 40.7%
	Monthly Rent	\$481	\$648	+ 34.7%
	Percent Housing, Owner Occupied	73.9%	78.0%	+ 5.5%

FIGURE 25: Cost of Child Care*Sources: MCC Child Care Demographics 2000 and 2005*

	Harford County		
	Base Year	Most Current Year	Change
Estimated child care costs (2000/2005) family of 4	\$10,854	\$13,548	+ 24.8%
Infant, age 1, family-care	\$5,734	\$7,039	+ 22.8%
Child, age 4, center-based care	\$5,119	\$6,508	+ 27.1%
as a percent of median income	17.9%	18.6%	+ 3.9%
Average Weekly Cost of Child Care (2000/2005)			
Infant/Toddler (0-24 months)/Family Provider	\$110	\$135	+ 22.7%
Infant/Toddler (0-24 months)/Center-Based	\$161	\$182	+ 13.0%
Toddler/Preschooler (age 2-5)/Family Provider	\$91	\$113	+ 24.2%
Toddler/Preschooler (age 2-5)/Center-Based	\$98	\$125	+ 27.6%

FIGURE 26: Children & Family Services Data*Sources: DHR Fact Pack 2003, KIDS COUNT Online, U.S. Census 1990, and U.S. Census 2000*

	Harford County		
	Base Year	Most Current Year	Change
Children under age 18 receiving FIP/TANF (1995/2003)	2,605	1,324	- 49.1%
Children under age 18 enrolled in Medicaid (1990/2003)	2,501	11,665	+ 366.4%
Infants/children under age 18 participating in WIC (1990/2003)	1,487	2,577	+ 73.3%
Elementary school children receiving free/reduced lunch, FARM (1999/2005)	12.3%	23.3%	+ 89.4%
Average monthly households receiving Food Stamps (1990/2003)	1,889	3,372	+ 78.5%
Average monthly households, per cycle, receiving Emergency Food Assistance Program, TEFAP (2001/2003)	3,618	2,435	- 32.7%
Average monthly households receiving Temporary Cash Assistance, TCA (1990/2003)	2,812	1,847	- 34.3%
Number low income families receiving (2002/2003)			
Maryland Energy Assistance Program, MEAP	3,345	4,172	+ 24.7%
Utility Service Protection Program, USPP	2,749	2,968	+ 8.0%
Electric Universal Service Program, EUSP	4,402	4,194	- 4.7%
Emergency & Transitional Housing Services, ETHS (2003)		992	
Stay in days		27	
Turn Aways		2,339	
Nights in emergency shelter		11,610	
Nights in transitional shelters		12,336	
Nights in motel		2,838	
Total bed nights		26,784	
Children receiving Purchase of Care (POC) vouchers (1990/2003)	396	1281	+ 223.5%
Homeless Women in Crisis Shelter Home Program (2002/2003)	270	392	+ 45.2%
Length of Stay	28	19	- 32.1%
Turned Away	27	47	+ 74.0%
Nights in Emergency Shelters	7,625	7,564	- 0.8%

Education¹⁴

Statistics on the education level in Harford County reveal that the rate of high school completion is 77.6 percent, with the dropout rate at 4.54 percent. The employment rate for high school graduates is 77.6 percent, compared with 40 percent for those who have not completed high school.

As a young child's first teachers, parents and caregivers play an important role in a young child's development. Yet, a percentage of Harford County residents do not possess the skills needed to be a first teacher. Consider that 12 percent (12%) of Harford County's adult population functions at a Level 1¹⁵ literacy rate and have low literacy skills. And, 13 percent of residents over age 25 do not have a high school diploma.

In addition, while a significant number of County residents have attended institutions of higher learning, only 27 percent of Harford County residents over age 25 have achieved a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 31 percent in the State of Maryland (see Figure 27).

FIGURE 27: Educational Attainment of Harford County Residents <i>Sources: US Census 1990 and US Census 2000.</i>	Harford County	
	Base Year	Most Current Year
Percent of persons 25 yrs+ high school grad. or higher (1990/2000)	81.6%	86.7%
Percent of persons 25 yrs+ college degree or higher (1990/2000)	21.5%	27.3%

¹⁴ Sources: *Child care Demographics 2000 and 2005* (Maryland Child Care Resource Network), *KIDS COUNT Online* (Annie E. Casey Foundation), *The State of Literacy in America* (National Institute for Literacy), *US Census 1990* (United States Census Bureau), and *US Census 2000* (United States Census Bureau).

¹⁵ Adults with a Level 1 Literacy Rate have low literacy skills; for example, these adults can read a food label or a simple story to a child, but do not have the ability to read and fill out an application. Literacy experts believe that adults with skills at Levels 1 lack a sufficient foundation of basic skills to function successfully in our society.

Harford County has many educational and family services programs devoted to helping children become ready to succeed (see Figure 28).

FIGURE 28: Children Served in Early Education Programs <i>Sources: Calvert County Family Network and Maryland Child Care Resource Network</i>	Harford County
Children under age of 5 (2000)	15,776
Children enrolled in kindergarten, public schools (2005)	2,656
Children enrolled in pre-K, public schools (2005)	803
Children enrolled in:	
Early Head Start	70
MRDC Head Start	192
Children served by (2005):	
Incredible Years	60
Infants & Toddlers	621
Healthy Start	
Safe Start	100
Outreach Efforts	
Harford County parents using LOCATE Services	1634

Many of these services are in high-demand, and can't meet the needs of the County. For example, Harford County Public Schools offers half-day pre-kindergarten services to only 803 economically disadvantaged students. For SY 2006/07, there is a waiting list of eligible children. The Early Head Start and Head Start programs can only provide services to 262 children based on federal funding; this is well below the number of Harford County children who are eligible for such services.

In addition, child care capacity, is not keeping pace with the County's growing demand:

- The County's current capacity is 7,890. This includes the capacity in state-licensed family care and center-based facilities—including Head Start— (7,087 children), as well as the capacity of state-sponsored early education programs, like preK (803 children),
- There are an estimated 11,553 children of working parents under age five needing care.

High quality early education is a key component in improving school readiness. The data demonstrates Harford County is making great strides:

- Nearly fifteen percent (13.6%) of Harford County's childcare centers (6 centers) have obtained national accreditation by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and/or state accreditation by MSDE.
- Eight state-licensed family care providers (1.5%) have voluntarily sought and obtained National Association of Family Child Care (NAFCC) accreditation.
- There are 15 nonpublic schools approved by the Maryland State Board of Education to provide services to children under 5 years of age.
- In 2005, the Open Doors Resource Center offered 75 workshops and continuing professional development opportunities to 967 early educators (family and center-based child care providers) in Cecil and Harford County.

- In 2003, 16 early educators (11 family care providers and 6 center-based staff) in Harford County were issued Child Care Credentials by the Child Care Administration. An additional 17 providers are currently enrolled in credentialing process.
- The Early Head Start and Head Start programs, among others, offer ongoing staff development.
- Harford County Public Schools promotes ongoing professional development of its preK and kindergarten staff, providing extensive training on the Maryland Model for School Readiness, among others.
- The percent of classes at Harford County Public Schools not taught by "Highly Qualified Teachers" declined by 44 percent in the last year. In SY 2005, only 11 percent of classrooms were taught by non-certified teachers.

Harford County can do more to increase the access to, as well as the number of, accredited programs with high-credentialed early educators. It is expected that such efforts will yield additional improvements in school readiness.

Figure 29 provides detailed information on the educational programs and the numbers of young children served.

FIGURE 29: High Quality Educators / Programs <i>Source: MCC—Maryland Child Care Resource Network and Child Care Demographics 2000 and 2005, Open Door Resource Center, Maryland State Department of Education</i>	Harford County		
	Base Year	Most Current Year	Change
Estimated children under age 5 requiring care	8,399	9,923	+ 18.1%
Licensed Providers/Capacity (1990/2005)			
Total	503 / 4,240	548 / 7,087	+ 8.9%/+ 67.1%
Family Providers	468 / 2,433	504 / 3,613	+ 7.6%/+ 48.5%
Center Providers (full-time facilities)	35 / 1,807	44 / 3,474	+ 25.7%/+ 92.3%
Early Education Programs Accredited by MSDE or NAEYC		6	
Early Education Programs Accredited by NAFCC		8	
Early educators issued Child Care Credential (2003)		16	
Current Child Care Credential Enrollment		17	
Providers attending Professional Development Programs through the Harford County CCRC		967	
Percent of classes at Harford County Public Schools not taught by “Highly Qualified Teachers” (2004/2005)	19.9%	11.1%	- 44.2%
Harford County Teacher Certification (2003/2005)			
Advanced Professional Certificate	52.9%	51.4%	- 2.8%
Standard Professional Certificate	40.6%	41.8%	+ 2.9%
Resident Teacher Certificate	0%	.1%	-
Conditional Certificate	3.9%	3.1%	- 20.5%
Average Annual Salary of Early Educators (1997/2002)			
Harford County Public School Teacher Salary	\$37,901	\$46,204	+ 21.9%
Maryland Public School Teacher Salary	\$41,404	\$50,303	+ 21.5%
Family Provider	\$17,285	\$20,965	+ 21.3%
Center Teacher	\$16,948	\$17,406	+ 2.7%
Center Aide	\$12,366	\$12,408	+ 0.3%

Health¹⁶

A healthy child is a child who is ready to succeed in school. And, Harford County demonstrates continued progress in this area. Ninety percent (90%) of pregnant women receive prenatal care in the first trimester, compared with 83.5 percent in Maryland.

Only 2 percent of births are to teen mothers. The percent of children fully immunized in Harford County by the age of two was 80%, slightly better than the state average.

Not all children, however, are “healthy.” A national study revealed that an estimated 30 percent of children (ages 2-5) are overweight, a precursor to numerous health concerns and chronic conditions. Harford County projects similar statistics for its children.

Despite the County’s overall wealth, there is considerable poverty, which particularly affects women with young children. In the 2004/05 school year, 23.3 percent of elementary school children in the County received free/reduced lunch, an 89.4% increase since 1999. The number of children enrolled in Medicaid has more than doubled between 1990 and 2000 with the number of children participating in WIC increasing by 73%.

Nearly 15 percent of elementary school children received special education services in school year 2004/05. Over 6 percent of children ages 5 to 15 have more than one disability.

Figure 30 provides detailed health data.

¹⁶ Sources: *DHR FactPack 2002* (Maryland State Department of Human Resources), *Maryland Annual Vital Statistics Report 2003* (Maryland State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene), *U.S. Census 1990* (United States Census Bureau), and *U.S. Census 2000* (United States Census Bureau).

FIGURE 30: Health Data	Harford County		
	Base Year	Most Current Year	Change
Children screened for lead exposure (0 to 72 months)	1,924 (10%)	3,170(16%)	+ 64.7%
Children with Elevated Blood Levels	16 (.8%)	24 (.8%)	+ 50%
Children with Lead Poisoning	1 (.1%)	3 (.1%)	+ 200%
Pregnant women obtaining early (first trimester) prenatal care (1990/2003)	85.5%	90.0%	+ 5.6%
Low-birth weight birth, less than 5.5 lbs. (1990/2003)	6.0%	7.0%	+ 16.6%
Teen birth rate (15 to 19) (1995/2003)	32.9	22.6	- 31.3%
Infant mortality rate (1994/2003)	7.0	5.0	- 28.6%
Children, ages 5 to 15, with disabilities (2000)		6.3%	
HCPS Elementary School children receiving special education services (2000/2005)	15.5	14.9	- 3.8%
Children with processed claims in the Public Mental Health System (1998/2003)	160	225	+ 40.6%
Net amount of mental health claims	\$79,908	\$235,920	+ 195.2%

Behavior and Social Environment¹⁷

Harford County is “plugged in” and is eliminating the “digital divide.” In 2005, 96 percent of Harford County Public Schools classrooms had internet-connected computers. The student to computer ratio for the county is 5.8:1, slightly higher than the Maryland target. Harford County is improving its home/school communication systems (100% of teachers have email, 78% of schools have a website), yet more needs to be done, as only 8 percent of schools have voice mail (compared with 31 percent in Maryland).

However, increasing demands affect the quality of life and decrease the amount of time parents spend with children. Over 48 percent of working parents work outside Harford County. The average one-way commute time for Harford County residents is 31.6 minutes (over one hour a day), decreasing the amount of time available to spend with their families and children.

A small number of children (birth to age 18) in Harford County are at risk for social, emotional, or behavioral problems due to injuries, abuse or neglect, or domestic violence. Between 2001 and 2003, there was a 155 percent increase in the number of children served by Access & Visitation Programs. Between 1990 and 2002, there was a 105 percent increase in the number of intakes at the Department of Juvenile Service.

The County experienced a 5 percent decline in the number of new victims reporting domestic violence, declining from 161 cases in 2001 to

155 in 2002. This statistic needs to be reviewed with caution, as the incidence of domestic violence may be under-reported. Further study will be done as the County is in the process of developing a new Family Justice Center.

Figure 31 provides in-depth behavioral data.

FIGURE 31: Behavioral Data Sources: DHR Fact Pack 2002 and 2003, Maryland's Vital Statistics Report 2003, US Census 1990 and U.S. Census 2000	Harford County		
	Base Year	Most Current Year	Change
Child Abuse and Neglect (1990/2002)	8.5	3.5	- 58.8 %
Number of new victims served by the Domestic Violence Program (2001/2003)	1973	1875	- 4.9%
Number of new victims served by rape crises programs (2001/2003)	161	155	- 3.7%
Department of Juvenile Justice Intake Cases (1990/2002)	1,060	2,173	+ 105.0%
Work/Family Issues (2000)			
Travel time to work (min.)			
Percent of parents working outside County	--	31.6	--
Percent of parents working outside State	--	44.7%	--
	--	3.4%	--

¹⁷ Sources: DHR Fact Pack 2002 (Maryland State Department of Human Resources), *Transportation Survey* (Harford County Interagency Council Transportation, 2001), *Maryland Annual Vital Statistics Report* (Maryland State Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 2002), *Maryland Technology Report* (Maryland Business Roundtable 2003), and the U.S. Census 2000 (United States Census Bureau).

Community Input (Perception-based Data)

Perception-based data provide a unique perspective on children entering school ready to learn.

In October 2005, the Committee released a survey to more than 300 parents of young children in order to gauge the needs of and services utilized by Harford County's parents with young children. More than 140 surveys were returned.

Demographic information about the respondents indicates:

- More than half of the respondents were Caucasian (56%), married (53%), and had household incomes of greater than \$40,000 annually (53%);
- Most respondents enrolled their children in early education settings (60%), with the majority in preschool (25%), Head Start (16%) or pre-kindergarten (13%); and
- Thirty-seven percent of respondents used childcare/early education programs more than 4 days per week.

The compiled results reveal:

1. Harford County has many assets for raising young children. Respondents cited the following as the "Best Things about Living in Harford County:"
 - Public Schools (67.1%)
 - Public libraries, parks, and recreation activities (58.7%)
 - Parent Support (43.45%)
 - Childcare (32.2%)
2. While most community services are highly rated, parents desire to see improvements in the following areas:
 - Employment opportunities (37.8%)
 - Parent Support Activities (27.3%)
 - Public Transportation (22.4%)
 - Health Services (21.0%)

3. Parents recognize the value of, use and would like more of Harford County community services and programs, specifically:

Figure 32: Community Services in Harford County	What services . . .		
	<i>Are available?</i>	<i>Do you use?</i>	<i>Do you want more of?</i>
Center-Based Preschool	59.4%	19.6%	15.4%
Child Care Resource Center	46.2%	14.7%	11.9%
Family Child Care	59.4%	18.2%	9.8%
Head Start	57.3%	15.4%	11.2%
Home Visiting Program	43.4%	19.6%	15.4%
Infant & Toddlers Program	71.3%	30.1%	19.6%
Prekindergarten	72.7%	31.5%	18.9%
Public Library	89.5%	80.4%	11.9%
Recreation Programs	81.8%	46.9%	29.4%

4. Parents gain information about available services most often from friends (78.3%), the local newspaper (76.2%), family (51.1%), and the faith community (51.7%).
5. When selecting an early education program, respondents look for:
 - Well-trained staff (69.9%)
 - Affordability (58.7%)
 - Child-staff ratio (58.0%)
 - Location (55.9%)
 - Curriculum (49.0%)

The survey results reveal that Harford County supports, values, and desires programs and services aimed at families with young children. If the County is to improve school readiness, it should effectively target the services used by families and the priorities identified. This information can also influence and guide plans for the dissemination of pertinent information and school readiness materials.

An Action Agenda for Harford County

The Harford County Partnership For Families and the Early Childhood Stakeholders Committee proposes a detailed Action Agenda aimed at improving the school readiness of children in Harford County.

The Committee purposefully aligned the Harford County Action Agenda with the statewide blueprint for improving school readiness, and adopts the six goals of Maryland's *Achieving School Readiness: A 5-Year Action Agenda*:

- Goal 1: All children, birth through age 5, will have access to quality early care and education programs that meet the needs of families, including full-day options.
- Goal 2: Parents of young children will succeed in their role as their child's first teacher.
- Goal 3: Children, birth through age 5, and their families, will receive necessary income support benefits and health and mental health care to ensure they arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies.
- Goal 4: All early care and education staff will be appropriately trained in promoting and understanding school readiness.
- Goal 5: All Maryland citizens will understand the value of quality early care and education as the means to achieve school readiness.
- Goal 6: Maryland will have an infrastructure that promotes, sufficiently funds, and hold accountable its school readiness efforts.

Ensuring that all Harford County children enter school ready to learn is an achievable goal. While it will take a strong and long-term commitment, the County is well poised to succeed.

The Committee spent several months developing the Action Agenda. While ambitious, it is realistic and attempts to coordinate the current services that are available to young children and families, depicting the countywide collaboration that is necessary to improve school readiness.

Within the six goals, the Committee included numerous strategies and action steps, which are critical for preparing children for school. The strategies are based on proven practices and the unique strengths of Harford County.

The Action Agenda provides a detailed picture of the action steps, collaborative partners, and level of investment, including degree of difficulty, estimated cost, and timeframe, which are coded as follows:

Collaborative Partners	
CCRC	Child Care Links—Harford/Cecil County Child Care Resource Center
CCEHS	Catholic Charities Early Head Start
CSA	Core Service Agency
EE	Various Early Education Programs
HCC	Harford Community College
HCDCS	Harford County Department of Community Services
HCDSS	Harford County Department of Social Services
HCHD	Harford County Health Department
HCPL	Harford County Public Library
HCPS	Harford County Public Schools
I&T	Harford County Infants & Toddlers Program
LMB	Local Management Board—The Harford County Partnership For Families
MRDC	MRDC Head Start
MSCCA	Maryland State Child Care Association, Harford/Cecil Chapter
MSDE	Maryland State Department of Education
OCC	Office of Child Care, Harford County
ODCC	Open Doors Career Center
UW	United Way
VM	Villa Maria, Inc. — Safe Start and Incredible Years

Level of Investment						
Estimated Cost		Degree of Difficulty		Timeframe		
\$	No additional costs or low-cost expansion	Y	No change in how we work together	►	Current	Periodic
				►►	Planned	Ongoing
				(◁)	Potential or projected	Monthly
\$\$	Moderate new funding	Y Y	Moderate changes			Bi-Monthly
						Quarterly
\$\$\$	Large investment of new funds	Y Y Y	Significant new approaches in the way things are done			Semi-annually
						Annually

Goal 1: All children, birth through age 5, will have access to quality early care and education programs that meet the needs of families, including full-day options.

Strategies	Action Step	Lead Partner	Estimated Cost	Level of Investment	
				Degree of Difficulty	Timeframe
<i>Ensure that early childhood education programs adhere to all state mandates and regulations, providing support to maintain and exceed state standards.</i>	• Conduct orientation meetings for prospective child care providers	OCC	\$	Y	▶ Monthly
	• Conduct unannounced and announced inspections in child care facilities to determine compliance with requirements	OCC	\$	Y	▶ Ongoing
	• Revise regulations pertinent to provider training requirements	OCC	\$	Y Y Y	▶ Semi-Annually
	• Conduct trainings for directors and owners of early childhood education programs on state regulations.	CCA	\$	Y	▶ Annually
<i>Coordinate and support the delivery of quality early intervention services.</i>	• Conduct in-home intervention, completing assessments of and providing services to at-risk young children.	I&T VM	\$	Y	▶ Ongoing
	• Inform, support, and provide staff development to early educators, community representatives, and parents about early intervention services and disabilities affecting young children.	I&T Project Act	\$	Y	▶ Ongoing
	• Coordinate and integrate mental health consultation and other intervention services into early care/education settings.	I&T VM	\$	Y	▶ Ongoing

Goal 1, continued

Strategies	Action Step	Lead Partner	Estimated Cost	Level of Investment		
				Degree of Difficulty	Timeframe	
<i>Incorporate and expand best practices that improve school readiness into early education settings.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate and encourage early education settings, such as Head Start, to visit local libraries and use their resources and programming. 	HCPL	\$	Y	►	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage early education settings to use the WSS/MMSR and incorporate it into their curriculum. 	MSDE HCPS ODCC CCRC	\$	Y	◊	--
<i>Improve access to high quality early education programs.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement full-day kindergarten for all 5-year-old children. 	HCPS	\$\$\$	Y Y Y	►►	--
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pilot full-day pre-kindergarten programming in 2 low performing schools. 	HCPS	\$\$	Y Y Y	►►	--
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand pre-kindergarten options for children with special needs. 	HCPS	\$\$	Y Y Y	►►	--
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for pre-kindergarten programs for all Harford County 4-year-olds at public schools or community settings. 	All Partners	\$\$\$	Y Y Y	◊	--
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruit and enroll eligible families, referring non-eligible families to appropriate services. 	HCPS MRDC CCEHS	\$	Y	►	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the Head Start and Early Head Start model to other early education programs, which includes parent supports, integrated services, and high-quality curriculum. 	All Partners	\$\$\$	Y Y Y	◊	--
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for increased funding and capacity of Head Start and Early Head Start programs. 	All Partners	\$\$\$	Y Y Y	◊	--
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand availability and accessibility of early care and education programs including public school pre-kindergarten, Early Head Start, Head Start, and childcare. 	TBD	\$\$\$	Y Y Y	◊	--

Goal 2: Parents of young children will succeed in their role as their child's first teacher.

Strategies	Action Step	Lead Partner	Estimated Cost	Level of Investment		
				Degree of Difficulty	Timeframe	
<i>Conduct intensive outreach to and education of parents regarding school readiness and promote strategies parents can employ.</i>	• Offer “parenting classes,” inviting parents of children under age 5.	CCRC VM EE	\$	Y Y	►►	Monthly
	• Provide “child care or social work classes” and encourage parents of young children to attend.	HCC	\$\$	Y Y	►	Ongoing
	• Host Parent Conferences.	CCA	\$	Y	►	Annually
	• Provide training using a national curriculum for parents of young children with early intervention services.	I&T VM	\$	Y	►	Ongoing
	• Invite parents of rising kindergartners to presentations on school expectations and the skills and knowledge their child needs to do well in school.	HCPS	\$	Y	↺	--
	• Make available “Ready At Five” monthly Activity Calendars and <i>ParentTips</i> to parents of young children, providing strategies and activities aimed at improving school readiness.	HCPL	\$	Y	►	Ongoing
	• Distribute newsletters, which include school readiness tips, to parents whose children are enrolled in childcare settings that participate in the “Opening the Gift Program.”	HCPL CCRC	\$	Y	►	Monthly
	• Incorporate tips on improving a child’s school readiness into adult and parent programming.	HCPL	\$	Y	►	Ongoing

Goal 2, continued

Strategies	Action Step	Lead Partner	Estimated Cost	Level of Investment		Timeframe
				Degree of Difficulty		
<i>Provide and expand early literacy efforts.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer “story times” for young children (infants to age 5), which incorporate emergent literacy principles, and provide parent handouts containing tips to improve school readiness. 	HCPL	\$	Y	►	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer a circulating, multi-media collection of books, toys, CDs and concept kits (alphabet letters, shapes, and numbers) that encourage parent-child interaction. 	HCPL	\$	Y	►	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support and educate parents on the selection of high-quality childcare and early education programs through LOCATE counseling intake. 	CCRC	\$	Y Y	►	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer a parent/early educator program focusing on dialogic reading as an important component of early literacy. 	HCPL	\$	Y	►►	Annually
<i>Empower parents.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage families to serve as advocates of young children through participation in Annapolis Lobby Days, the development of Master Plans, and serving on strategic steering committees. 	TBD	\$	Y	()	--
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand Parent-to-Parent opportunities, enabling parents to network, share, and learn from each other. 	TBD	\$	Y	()	--

- Assess family needs, build partnerships with families, and seek parental input on programs.

MRDC
CCEHS
EE

\$

Y

►

Ongoing

Goal 3: Children, birth through age 5, and their families, will receive necessary income support benefits and health and mental health care to ensure they arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies.

Strategies	Action Step	Lead Partner	Estimated Cost	Level of Investment		Timeframe
				Degree of Difficulty		
<i>Promote an integrated system of early care health and mental health services.</i>	• Foster service coordination, to assess and support at-risk children through periodic screening, diagnosis, services, and training.	I&T VM	\$	Y	►	Ongoing
	• Provide information and referrals to families with children who have mental health needs.	CSA	\$	Y	►	Ongoing
	• Coordinate with early care settings to conduct behavioral interventions, as appropriate.	I&T VM	\$	Y	►	Ongoing
	• Provide mental health and behavioral intervention services to parents and children who are at-risk for out of home placement.	I&T VM	\$	Y	►	Ongoing
	• Integrate Lead Poisoning outreach and education campaign activities into all early education settings.	TBD	\$	Y	()	--
	• Support the strategic planning and implementation efforts of the Harford County Health Department and Harford County Department of Social Services, resulting in a more coordinated system of health and income support services.	TBD	\$	Y	()	--

Goal 3, continued

Strategies	Action Step	Lead Partner	Estimated Cost	Level of Investment		Timeframe
				Degree of Difficulty		
<i>Ensure that all young children have health insurance and access to health care.</i>	• Promote and distribute the MCHP application at all early care settings.	TBD	\$	Y	()	--
	• Promote the importance of well visits, immunizations, hearing/vision screenings, and lead poisoning prevention to all families with young children.	TBD	\$	Y	()	--
<i>Provide income supports and other services to families.</i>	• Provide career training and support groups for women re-entering the workforce and parenting teens.	ODCC	\$	Y	►	Ongoing

Goal 4: All early care and education staff will be appropriately trained in promoting and understanding school readiness.

Strategies	Action Step	Lead Partner	Estimated Cost	Level of Investment		
				Degree of Difficulty	Timeframe	
Expand continuing education, credentialing and professional development of early educators to improve the quality of care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide training and professional development to early educators. 	CCRC EE	\$	Y	▶	Monthly
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host Child Care Conferences for early educators. 	HCC/CCA	\$	Y Y	▶	Semi-Annually
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct Roundtables for early educators that address school readiness. 	OCC	\$	Y Y	▶	Semi-Annually
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Host and encourage Harford County early educators to attend the Maryland State Child Care Association Conference. 	MSCCA	\$	Y	▶	Semi-Annually
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer a variety of courses that are aligned with MSDE certification requirements. 	HCC	\$\$	Y Y	▶	Semi-Annually
Support and encourage early education programs to participate in national or state accreditation/credentialing processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote accreditation and credentialing through introductory workshops and technical assistance to early educators. 	CCRC ODCC	\$	Y	↻	--
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore and research various incentives aimed at increasing participation in the accreditation and credentialing processes. 	TBD	\$	Y	↻	--

Goal 4, continued

Strategies	Action Step	Lead Partner	Estimated Cost	Level of Investment		
				Degree of Difficulty	Timeframe	
Establish opportunities for and access to cross-training and joint professional development.	• Host Providers/Early Educators at HCPS MMSR Training, offering clock hours.	HCPS	\$	Y	►	Annually
	• Conduct Professional Development Site Visits, where Family Providers and Child Care Center staff visit Kindergarten classrooms to observe students and talk with teachers on expectations.	HCPS	\$	Y	↻	--
	• Offer licensed early educators information, models, and techniques focused on building emergent literacy skills through the “Opening the Gift” program, an interactive story-based program presented in the family-child care home and at the public library.	HCPL CCRC	\$	Y	►	Ongoing
	• Provide staff development and training opportunities focused on school readiness.	I&T HCPL	\$ \$	Y Y	►►	Periodic
Encourage the use of evidence-based early education curriculum and practices.	• Provide training for early educators on school readiness and the Domains of Learning.	CCRC	\$	Y	►	Monthly
	• Provide in-depth MMSR training for Child Care Providers.	CCRC	\$	Y Y	►	Annually

Goal 5: All Maryland citizens will understand the value of quality early care and education as the means to achieve school readiness.


Strategies	Action Step	Lead Partner	Estimated Cost	Level of Investment		
				Degree of Difficulty	Timeframe	
Utilize a public awareness campaign, which is aligned with current statewide “Countdown to Kindergarten” efforts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Include school readiness information in parent pamphlets that licensed early educators are required to share with their parents. 	OCC	\$\$	Y' Y' Y'	()	--
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote accredited programs and credentialed providers. 	All Partners	\$	Y'	()	--
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a comprehensive public awareness strategy focused on school readiness and its relationship to quality early care and education services for all children and families. Utilize a corresponding dissemination strategy aimed at faith-based organizations, Harford Cable Network, play groups, mom’s clubs, retail, restaurants, and other business, 	TBD	\$\$\$	Y' Y' Y'	()	--

Goal 6: Maryland will have an infrastructure that promotes, sufficiently funds, and hold accountable its school readiness efforts.

Strategies	Action Step	Lead Partner	Estimated Cost	Level of Investment		
				Degree of Difficulty	Timeframe	
Assure the implementation, accountability and integrity of the Achieving School Readiness: A Strategic Plan for Young Children in Harford County.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Establish a permanent Early Care and Education Committee to oversee and hold accountable school readiness efforts in Harford County.	LMB	\$	Y Y	Y	--
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Coordinate with, participate on, and support efforts of various early childhood advisory councils and committees.	All partners	\$	Y	Y	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Facilitate ongoing planning and support for early childhood services and linkages to an overall system of care.	LMB	\$	Y	Y	Ongoing
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Integrate key strategies and support the implementation of the Harford County Local Access Plan.	LMB	\$	Y	Y	--
Assure accountability and integrity of the school readiness data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Monitor, assess, and publicize the MMSR data, taking necessary action where indicated by the data.	HCPS	\$	Y Y	Y	Annually


Next Steps

The Harford County Early Childhood Stakeholders Committee has successfully outlined current activities conducted by individual community agencies and entities that have an impact on young children and families and the many aspects of school readiness.

In addition, the Committee has engaged in meaningful discussions regarding potential new and collaborative strategies (as identified in the Action Agenda by the  symbol) for future action, enhancing individual efforts and collectively addressing the story behind the readiness data in Harford County.

In order to build on what is already being done in the County and to promote future school readiness efforts, it is recommended that the Early Childhood Stakeholders Committee is transformed into a permanent Early Care and Education Committee managed by the Harford County Partnership For Families. This new committee should oversee the implementation of the Action Agenda, as well as the continuation of the strategic planning process. It will also hold organizations, entities, and public agencies accountable for school readiness efforts in Harford County.

The current Harford County Action Agenda for School Readiness, as depicted in this document is only a first step.

The Action Agenda can only become a comprehensive strategic plan when actions/activities and corresponding timelines are developed that address targeted priorities and promote the collaboration. Additionally, the potential and proposed Action Steps () should be further reviewed and prioritized to enhance and enrich existing services and reach target populations. Only through further planning efforts can Harford County avoid duplication and address the gaps in relevant services to unserved and underserved children and families.

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United States Census Bureau. US Census 2000. Washington, DC 2002.

Glossary of Terms¹⁸

Accreditation. A process by which early childhood *programs* improve their programs to meet national or state quality standards (i.e. NAEYC or MSDE accredited). In Harford County, 6 child care programs are MSDE or NAEYC accredited and 8 child care programs accredited is NAFCC.

At-risk. Children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (i.e. eligible for free and reduced priced meals, Head Start or pre-K programs).

Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act. Enacted by the Maryland General Assembly in 2002, the Bridge to Excellence in Public Schools Act focuses on adequacy and equity, with the state's disadvantaged school systems receiving a greater share of the education funding to be provided over the next six years. The legislation also includes provisions for mandatory full-day kindergarten and pre-kindergarten for disadvantaged four-year-olds for all jurisdictions by 2007

Child care. Regulated care of children outside the child's home in either a licensed center-based facility (i.e. child-care center) or in a registered family child care home (family child care). Harford County currently has 548 state licensed/registered providers, with a capacity of 7,087 children.

Child Care Resource and Referral Centers (CCRC). A public-private partnership initiated in 1989 to provide leadership and services designed to improve the quality, availability and affordability of child care in each of Maryland's jurisdictions. CCRCs are administered by the Maryland Committee for Children under a contract with the Maryland State Department of Education. Starting in 2006, Harford County is served by Child Care Links. All data in this report is from the Open Door Resource Center, which served as the Harford County CCRC prior to 2006.

Child Find. Child Find is an ongoing process through which children with disabilities, from birth through 21 years of age, who are eligible for intervention or in need of special education services are identified, located and evaluated.

Collaboration. To work together toward a common goal.

Community capacity. The ability of those within the community to provide leadership, make programmatic changes, build collaborative frameworks, manage large-scale organizational changes that reach from senior management to front-line workers, and navigate multiple financial streams in order to build a seamless system.¹⁹

Comprehensive services. Services that are not limited to a certain area but address and support the holistic needs of a child and in many instances the child's family, e.g., health care, social services, transportation, parental involvement.

Covering Kids & Families Campaign. A public outreach project to enroll eligible uninsured children and adolescents in Maryland's Children's Health Insurance Program (MCHIP). This outreach is housed in Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene.

¹⁸ *Achieving School Readiness: A 5-Year Action Agenda for Maryland.* Leadership in Action Program, Baltimore, Maryland: Maryland Subcabinet for Children, Youth and Families, 2002.

¹⁹ "Building the Capacity of Localities in Maryland for Systems Reform: Technical Assistance for LMB's, Local Governments, and Other Stakeholders," Report and recommendations of the Intergovernmental Administration Work Team to the Maryland Systems Reform Transition Team, August 1977.

Credentialing. The process of validating an *individual's* education and experience in the area of early childhood/elementary education and the issuance of a certificate to recognize the level of achievement. In Harford County, 16 family child care providers and center-based staff have received the Child Care Credential, and 17 participants are currently enrolled in the credentialing process.

Curriculum. Planned activities of a program that serves children.

Developmentally appropriate practice. Activities for young children that are suited to the age, the developmental stage, and the learning style of every individual child. Developmentally appropriate practices consider all factors: age, developmental stage, learning style and appropriate curriculum.²⁰ Developmentally appropriate practices also emphasize the importance of play in children's cognitive, physical, emotional, and social development.²¹

Domains of Learning. According to many early childhood experts a child needs to be supported and nurtured in the following areas of child development: the arts, language and literacy, mathematical thinking, physical development, scientific thinking, social & emotional development, and social studies. MSDE adopted these Domains of Learning in their MMSR framework.

Early childhood care and education. A full range of care, education and support for children ages birth through six, including child care, Early Head Start/Head Start, preschool, Family Support Centers, home visiting, early literacy, local Infants & Toddlers programs, and health and mental health services.

Early Intervention Program. Services that are provided early in a child's life to promote healthy growth and development and to prevent avoidable developmental delay or disability (i.e. Infants & Toddlers Program).

Food Stamps. A federally supported program enabling low-income families to buy nutritious food with coupons and Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) cards. Food stamp recipients spend their benefits to buy eligible food in authorized retail food stores.

Free and Reduced Priced Meals (FRPM). The application and eligibility component of the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), a federally assisted meal program operating in public and non-profit private school and residential child care institutions. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day. Eligibility for FRPM is sometimes used as a proxy indicator for poverty.

Head Start and Early Head Start. Federally funded comprehensive child development programs for low-income families with children from birth to age five, pregnant women, and children with disabilities. Comprehensive services include early childhood education, health and development, nutrition, and family support. MRDC currently operates the Harford County Head Start program and serves 192 children. Catholic Charities operates Harford County's Early Head Start program, which serves 70 children, under age 3.

²⁰ National Conference of State Legislatures, "Early Childhood Care and Education: An Investment That Works" (National Conference of State Legislatures: Washington, DC, 1995).

²¹ National Association for the Education of Young Children, *Early Childhood Centers: Services to Prepare Children for School Often Limited* (US General Accounting Office: Washington, DC, 1995).

Healthy Start. The federally funded program provides community-based, culturally competent, family-centered, and comprehensive perinatal health services to women, infants and their families in communities with high rates of infant mortality, low birth weight, and racial disparities in perinatal outcomes.

Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY). A national home visiting/school readiness strategy that recognizes parents as their child's first and most important teacher. HIPPY helps parents work with their three, four, and five year old children. Harford County HIPPY program currently operates in eight communities (children that will enter Appeal, Beach, Harford, Mutual, Patuxent, St. Leonard, Sunderland, and Windy Hill elementary schools) and serves 130 families.

Home Visiting. Services provided to a child and his/her family in the family home. Services can be offered by professionals as well as paraprofessionals. Services may be targeted to the parent or adult caregiver, the child, or both. Services may be provided on a regular or as-needed basis.

Infants & Toddlers Program. A statewide interagency early intervention system providing services for children from birth to age three (infants and toddlers) with disabilities and their families that enhance their development. The Harford County Infants & Toddlers program currently serves 621 children.

Judith P. Hoyer Early Child Care and Education Centers (Judy Centers). Partnerships between local school systems, local agencies, and community-based organizations come together for the purpose of improving young children's school readiness. Judy Center services include quality early childhood education, health and family support services. Currently, there is not a Judy Center in Harford County.

Local Management Board (LMB). LMBs serve as the conduit for collaboration and coordination of child and family services at the county level. With local child-serving agencies, local child providers, clients of services, and other community representatives on the board, LMBs address the needs of and set priorities for their communities. The Harford County Partnership for Families is the LMB for Harford County and targets three result areas: 1) Children Successful in School; 2) Children Safe in their Homes & Communities; and 3) Stable and Economically Independent Families.

Maryland Children's Health Insurance Program (MCHIP). A federal and state funded health insurance program designed to provide full health benefits for children up to age 19 and pregnant women of any age who meet the income guidelines.

Maryland Model for School Readiness (MMSR). A statewide school readiness framework that includes "readiness" outcomes and indicators. The MMSR also includes an assessment component, where kindergarten teachers use an instrument known as the Work Sampling System (WSS) to assess all children at the start of the school year, to inform instruction and support young children's readiness for school. The MMSR also includes ongoing staff development. The Maryland State Department of Education releases annual statewide assessment data on what entering kindergarten children know and are able to do.

Medicaid. A jointly funded, federal-state health insurance program for individuals including children, the blind, and/or the disabled, and people who are eligible to receive federally assisted income maintenance payments.

Preschool. Educational services for three- and four-year-olds that are provided at either a public or private facility.

Pre-K or Prekindergarten. Public school education (state funded) for 4-year-old children at-risk for school success. Pre-K is administered by the local boards of education and regulated by the Maryland State Department of Education. Similar pre-K programs are also offered in private venues (not state funded) for 4 year olds. Harford County pre-K program serves 803 children.

Purchase of Care (POC). A federal and state funded child care subsidy program designed to defray child care costs for low income parents in the workforce. In Harford County, 1281 families receive POC vouchers (vouchers were frozen in 2003).

Safe Start. Funded by the Department of Human Resources, Safe Start is an early assessment and intervention program focused on preventing child abuse and neglect by providing screening, referral, and intervention services to families with children from birth through six years. In FY 2005, 100 families were served.

School Readiness. State of early development that enables an individual child to engage in and benefit from first-grade learning experiences. As a result of family nurturing and interactions with others, a young child in this stage has reached certain levels of physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, language development, and cognition and general knowledge. School readiness as a philosophy acknowledges individual approaches toward learning as well as unique experiences and backgrounds of each child.²²

Special Education. Services provided to students with disabilities who have a current Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Women, Infants and Children's Program (WIC). A federally funded program, formally known as Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children, that provides healthy supplemental foods and nutrition counseling for pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children under age 5. WIC served 2,577 Harford County infants and children in 2003.

Work Sampling System (WSS). A state-adopted early childhood assessment system used as part of the MMSR that determines young children's skills in the seven domains of learning.

²²Maryland State Department of Education, "Maryland Model for School Readiness" (Maryland State Department of Education: Baltimore: MD)